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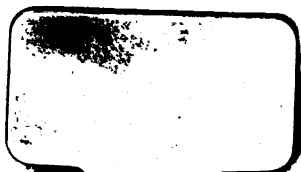
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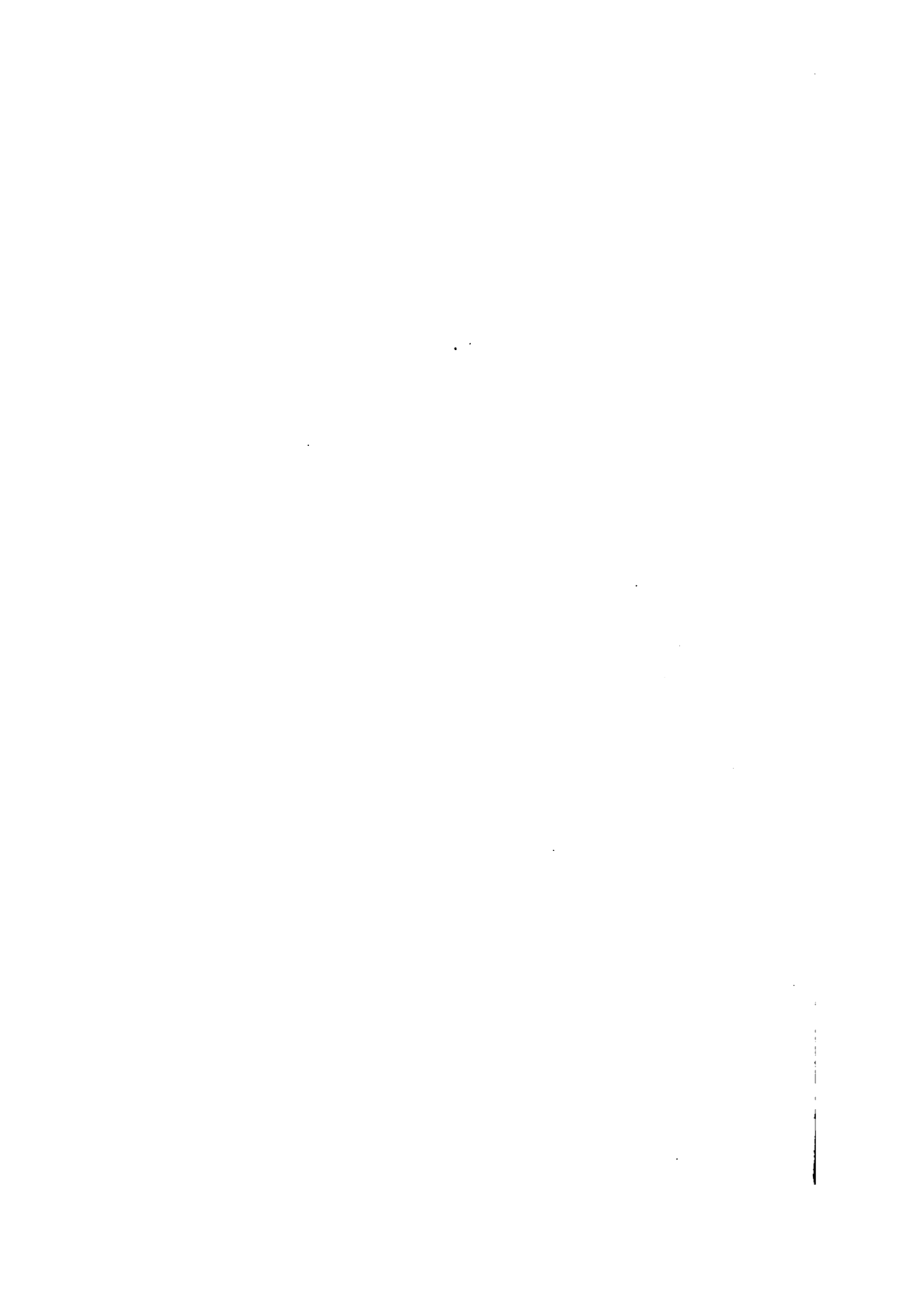
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GERALDINE MAYNARD.

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VOL. I

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GERALDINE MAYNARD;

OR,

THE ABDUCTION.

A TALE OF THE DAYS OF SHAKSPEARE.

BY CAPTAIN CURLING,

AUTHOR OF "THE SOLDIER OF FORTUNE," "JOHN OF ENGLAND,"
"SHAKSPEARE, THE LOVER, THE POET," &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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1864.

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TO THE READER.

The following work—a tale of the days of Shakspeare—and the composition of which had been truly a labour of love to its lamented author, was destined to be his last production. A fatal malady—disease of the heart—from the effects of which he had long suffered, terminated his existence rather suddenly, on the 16th February, soon after the last sheet of the book reached his hands.

The indulgence of the reader, will, it is hoped, kindly excuse some typographical and other errors which, under these painful circumstances, escaped the author's correction when the sheets were passing through the

press. His state of ill health not only disqualified him for the task of carefully revising his work, but served, moreover, to render him morbidly sensitive to adopting the alternative of devolving that task upon another.

Among the inaccuracies that would otherwise have been removed may be mentioned: the spelling of the name of Walsingham, which has been printed throughout *Walshingham* ; and the substitution of *Oxford* for *Norwich*, at page 212 vol. i ; besides, here and there, some obvious grammatical errors and misprints.

London, March, 1864.

GERALDINE MAYNARD,

OR

THE ABDUCTION.

CHAPTER I.

It is winter, sharp and severe. Icicles do now, 'in good sooth,' hang by the wall, and Dick, the ploughman, blows his nails vehemently as he hurries homewards, through the driving snow storm.

Barnes Common seems bowed down with the iron frost, the bladed grass on its surface to have become perished and nipped up hopelessly under the icy spell.

Winter, with his snowy beard has indeed commenced, and men's thoughts and aspirations would all seem now to be wrapped

up in blazing wood fires, genial hearths, and closed doors—no matter,

“Heap on more logs, the wind is chill,
We’ll keep our merry Christmas still.”

In the old Hall of Barnes the logs burned bright and cheery. There was no lack; a ruddy glow shone upon the walls, and upon targe, helm, and jack, as they hung there on either hand.

Warm and cheery, and full of comfort too, seemed the interiors of the low-roofed, large-chimneyed cottages which skirted that Common, as the clock from the neighbouring belfry of the village church

“Sounded one unto the drowsy race of night.”

Christmas tide is near, and almost every cottage hath its circle gathered round the hearth, ere retiring for the night.

As they do so, the hoof tread of the traveller is heard far away on the hard road, whilst in the intervals of their converse, the late sitters listen to the wind as it roars and

rushes amidst the thick woods, which stretch towards Sheen and old Richmond Park. Ringing clear at one moment, then dull and heavy in sound at another, as the traveller spurs over the frosted surface of the hard road and then upon its grassy margin on either hand, it comes nearer and more near. Carriages and other vehicular conveyances in those days and in that neighbourhood were but rarely used, almost all travel being on horseback or by the river. The heavy wain of the carrier with its tinkling bells was but a weekly comer; the coach of the noble, (escorted by a score or two of servants on horseback) was also a rarity, at this inclement season, and in such unsettled times. Nay, even the advent of a solitary horseman like the lated traveller "now spurring apace," even, we say, the advent of such a sound was sufficient to make the cottager open his ears and rub the elbow in expectation of some startling news from the world without.

Meantime, still rings the hoof tread of the advancing horseman. Now it sounds almost

at hand, then as some turn in the road occurs, it seems to die away, till another turn brings it within ken; and now it comes to where the gibbeted murderer swings and creaks in chains upon the open down, and then it stops where the sign post directs which way to take to Sheen, and which to old Richmond; then it comes again across the waste—tramp, tramp, tramp, sharp and clear, and then dull, dead and hollow.

And who, and what is that solitary horseman thus riding in the chill winter night when times are wild, and when, indeed, few travellers are bold enough to take the road, even on the most important business, unless accompanied by at least three or four comrades “armed to the teeth.”

Who, we say, is this horseman, thus riding alone “with unbated zeal,” spurring onward through wood and field, and who apparently thinks not of—cares not for

“The gentlemen of the shade, the minions of the moon,”

who infest the neighbourhood of almost every outlet from London town.

Let us take a glance at him as he rides ; for be it known to our readers, that if but a faint outline—but a brief and passing shadow—of that traveller were now to appear, millions of heads would start up to look, and as many voices sound out to cheer him as he rides. Full two hundred and sixty winters have passed since that bleak night, when that man rode along unattended, unknown, unheeded, over Barnes Common.

Look at him as he bestrides his horse, which in good sooth is none of best—a stout hackney well able for the road, but still a mere hack, of the every day sort, a kind of gallo-way nag, furnished by mine hosts of the “Checquers” in Blue-boar Lane near Old Paul’s.

But the rider of that ordinary nag, let us take a glance at him, as the moon shines brightly upon the surrounding scene, and tips with silver the forest trees and the bladed grass which lies frosted under his feet.

It is a face once seen, never to be forgotten. A face of genius and beauty, such

as few, even in an age teeming with manly beauty could boast of, and well befitting one whose superior genius seems to grow more sublime as years roll on to swell the distance between his glorious day and this duller age of ours. The nose is straight and shapely and the mouth beautifully formed; a high crowned hat, decked with a single sable plume shades his ample brow. His eyes are like those of the eagle, so piercing in their glance, yet so soft in their repose; his eyebrows are somewhat thick and darker than his beard, his cheek is beautifully rounded, and altogether the contour of the whole face has an indescribable charm. The figure of the man is good too. A good man's picture altogether, albeit it is half hidden by the large riding cloak, and the heavy boots with which his lower limbs are encumbered. To the girdle or waist belt which gathers the cloak closely to his body, is attached one of those curiously guarded rapiers usually carried by horsemen of the period, and a brace of heavy petronels or pistols are stuck, ready to the hand, in his belt.

CHAPTER II.

As the traveller advanced towards the belt of trees which skirted the opposite side of the Common, a horseman slowly emerged from the covert and confronted him.

"Stand," said the opposing horseman, in a loud peremptory tone, "Stand fast, where you are, I say." The traveller drew bridle, and stood still as he was desired.

"Whence come, and whither bound?" enquired the new comer. "Come, answer quickly."

"From London and for Windsor," returned the traveller.

"Have you any pass?"

"None."

"Then you are over bold to cross Barnes Common at this hour," returned the horseman curtly.

"I have done so many a time and oft, good Captain, and no harm has yet come on't," returned the traveller coolly.

"Even so," replied the highwayman, "and yet you pass not again friend without tithe or toll—your purse."

"If you would have it, you must, take it good Captain Malmains."

"How, my name?" said the robber in some surprise.

"Even so, you see I know you."

"Knowledge is sometimes dangerous. How came you by the knowledge you boast of?"

"What great ones do, the less will prattle of," said the traveller, smiling. "There be few in East Chepe who have not heard of the bold outlaw Malmains. The setter of exploits all round the court suburb. Come, I have no pass, and yet I must pass free. Although I have never before

encountered yourself, good Captain, your comrades have always given me free passage."

The opposing highwayman advanced his steed a few paces closer, and looked at the traveller as the moon shone brightly on his open brow.

"May all the good wishes of all men attend thee, Good Will," he said, as he recognized the face before him. "Pass on in Heaven's name, and woe be to the caitiff who would harm a hair of thy head. "Yet stay," he said, as the traveller was moving onwards. "Best take the word, as St. Nicholas' clerks are out to-night in strength, and you may peradventure come across some new hand."

CHAPTER III.

OUR traveller took the pass, bade good night to the courteous highwayman, and putting spurs to his steed, once more passed onwards. Leaving the Common, he entered a dark and deeply rutted lane, and thence emerged, where hundreds of broad, short, stemmed oaks proclaimed the close vicinity of Richmond Forest. At this moment another horseman issued from amongst the trees, rapidly overtook and passed him, bending down and peering into his face as he did so ; then turning, repassed, lifted his castor, bade him good speed and again disappeared. Our traveller now again pushed on, and soon came upon those charming glades which lay be-

twixt the towns of Richmond and Kingston. His intent was to take a short cut well known to himself, and which led towards Datchet and old Windsor.

Suddenly, however, in the bright moonlight which, thick as were the forest trees on either hand, had hitherto enabled him to thread his way, he was aware of a prostrate form which lay apparently dead, almost in his path. To pull up, jump down, and kneel beside the prostrate body was the work of a few moments with our traveller.

He thought, perhaps, that by timely succour he might save a life. But as he bent down, the caitiff, taking advantage of his good purpose, seized him by the throat, grappled him hard, and springing up, threw himself upon him. At the same moment, a couple of accomplices darted from amidst the trees on either hand, and after dealing him several heavy blows on the head, proceeded to rifle the pockets of his doublet, and then without further circumstance they left him weltering in his blood.

It was lucky for the wounded man that the frost was intense, as it served to clot and freeze the blood which issued from the deep wounds he had received.

* * *

Some hours elapsed (so heavy had been the blows the ruffians had dealt the traveller) ere he awoke to consciousness, and then he found that he was so much disabled that he could only raise himself with difficulty and gaze anxiously around, in the hope of succour being available near the spot. Nothing, however, was to be seen or heard in that lone locality, but the angry and short bellow of the stag as he fretted amongst the fern in the distance, and the cry of the night bird in the deeper gloom of the forest.

The traveller now looked around for his steed, which was quietly grazing at some little distance, and then he managed to raise himself upon his feet. The exertion, however, was too much, it caused his wounds to burst out afresh, his brain reeled and he again fell prostrate amid the fern.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR scene now returns to old Barnes Common. Some hours have passed since the event recorded in the former chapter, and our readers are invited to enter the portal and visit the interior of one of the low-roofed large-chimneyed cottages located here and there on the skirts of the waste.

In the principal room, the kitchen (if we may so term it) of one of these Flemish looking interiors, surrounded by the inmates, lay the traveller who we last saw prostrate in Richmond Park.

Men, women and children, nearly a dozen individuals, were gathered together there. The news of a man found nearly murdered and lying in the road some few miles off, and

whose body had been stumbled upon in the early dawn by old Ralph Maynard, the miller, and his sons, and brought in by them, lying across their old Dobbin, like a sack of flour, had served to draw together the assemblage.

"Well," said old Ralph Maynard, as he stood amongst the circle, and after a steady gaze at the pallid face of the stranger. "The man's dead, that's quite clear, any one of them ere blows, methinks, would have been enough for most of us. 'Twere best, methinks, to take him up and carry him into the next room and lay him on the bed till a doctor comes; what say ye, lads, wilt bear a hand?"

The miller's stalwart sons, George and Hodge, upon this summons raised the prostrate form, and together they carried it into an inner chamber where it was laid upon a bed just as the head leech of Barnes entered the cottage.

Upon being shewn into the chamber, after a brief glance at the body the

Leech pronounced life extinct. Nay, that the traveller must have been dead some hours.

The doctor was a foreigner, a Frenchman, and being in full practise in the neighbouring town, was somewhat abrupt in manner, and irritable in disposition.

"What for you send for me, to a dead man, Master Maynard," he said, pointing to the prostrate body, "do you think I have nothing to do here in town? By Gar, I am worked to death myself."

"Nay, but how are we to know aught about dead folk or live folk either, unless you give the word, good doctor," returned the shrewd Miller, turning and winking his eye to the bystanders.

"By Gar then, I suppose you think I have life and death in my hands, eh, Master Maynard?"

"What is that in your hand even now?" inquired the Miller with a grin, as he again glanced around the circle.

"What this?" said the Doctor, "Mon

Dieu, it is the potion, the philtre, the mixture, the restorative."

"Ah, just so," returned Maynard, "there is life or death then in your hands as you say, at this moment."

"'Tis von deuced lie, Master Maynard," returned the Doctor. "This is a restorative I tell you, a dram; something to do good withal, to warm the heart, cheer the spirit, and give life to the body."

"Give it to me then, if that's the case," said a young girl, coming forward at this moment, and taking the phial from the hand of the village practitioner.

"If this philtre is likely to give life to the body," she said, "in Heaven's name let it be tried here at once. This man is not dead, good doctor."

"Gad a mercy me!" returned the Doctor turning sharply. "What, is that you Geraldine? Nay, then, we must all give way when you command."

Whilst the Doctor spoke, the young girl had stepped close to the apparent corpse,

and beckoning to one of the bystanders to hold up his head, she poured the contents of the phial down his throat.

"This man, I tell you, Doctor, is not dead," she again said; "and shame befall you if you fail to do all that your professional skill has taught in such a case."

The Doctor put on his spectacles, and looked at Geraldine steadily for a few moments, and then he approached the body.

"By my faith you were ever a little shrew," he said, "but then you are a clever lass too. What makes you say the man is not dead, my girl, when he has half a dozen deep cuts on his brain pan, and all the blood in his body is drained out?"

"Because I can feel a pulse at his wrist, and so may you if you only take the trouble to do so," returned the girl.

The Doctor now again approached the wounded man, and felt his pulse.

"By my fay, good Geraldine, thou art right," he said, "the man still lives. Be

quick, dame," he added, addressing the Miller's wife. "Come, produce some of your gear at once, your aqua vitæ, your liqueur case, good Mistress Maynard. Come, quick I say. Geraldine is right. Where there is life there is hope; the man is not dead, sure enough."

All was now bustle and confusion. Hot flannels, cordials, all and everything that the medical skill of the Leech could suggest were procured. The green wounds were dressed and plastered up, and in the course of a couple of hours from the time of his entering the cottage, so far from being a dead man, the wounded traveller was so much recovered as to be able to look around, and apparently speculate upon all that was being done in his service.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN the wounded man opened his eyes the next morning, he felt wonderfully well, considering the state he had been in but a few hours before. Rest and a strong constitution had served him in good stead, and as he raised his head, and, despite his battered state, looked around, his youthful attendant thought she had never before beheld so sweet and benevolent a countenance.

Geraldine Maynard, the young girl who so readily came to the rescue, if we may so term it, and had indeed saved his life by her quickness and acute observation, had con-

stituted herself his attendant during the night. She was the niece of old Maynard, the miller of Barnes, a young and lovely girl of some eighteen years of age, with a cheek of cream, hair like the black cock's wing, piercing eyes, and a small, slight figure symmetrically and beautifully formed.

She had insisted upon tending the wounded man through the night, as she saw in a moment that his case required the utmost care and vigilance, and as her word was law, not only in that small community, but all around the immediate neighbourhood, she in this instance, as in all others, had her way.

And as the wounded man now gazed upon her when he woke the next morning, he in turn thought he had never looked upon a sweeter or a more intelligent face. Half bewildered and weak as he was, he was about to address her; but she put a finger to her lip, as a sign that he must be silent.

"You must neither speak nor be spoken to, good sir," she said. "Such were the Leech's orders last night when he left the cottage."

"And how if I disobey them, sweet maid?" said the patient.

"Then I must leave you, fair sir," she rejoined. "You will scarcely be able to converse when you have no one to talk to."

"That threat is all sufficient," said the patient, sinking down upon his pillow. "I would rather not run the risk of such a punishment; and, in sooth, my head does indeed seem battered and bruised, and my brain addled by the blows I have received. Yet, tell me one thing, sweet maid," continued he, "how came I here, and under whose hospitable roof am I thus sheltered?"

"In brief, then," replied Geraldine, "you are under the roof of my uncle, Ralph Maynard, the miller of Barnes. You were found by him and his sons lying wounded and insensible in the park hard by."

The wounded man gratefully pressed the

fair hand he held in his own, took the medicine which Geraldine offered him, and soon afterwards "nature's soft nurse" had steeped "his senses in forgetfulness."

CHAPTER VI.

IN about a week from the time of his first entrance to old Maynard's cottage, the wounded traveller was able to rise from his bed. The chamber he was in, was one of those ample, low-roofed rooms which here and there are still to be found in the rural districts of old England. Its one large window looked out upon a pleasant garden : "in the sweet summer prime," a charming scene, with its leafy bowers, its trim walks, and its little orchard beyond ; while in the distance the lovely glades of Sheen forest completed the beauty of the picture.

Now, however, as the wounded traveller gazed upon the wintry scene without, the ruddock with its red breast perched upon

the stone window sill, the blackbird hopped upon the little frosty patch where the dial stood, and the broad, round, setting sun, shining upon leafless trees and shrubs, covered every portion of the outward world with showers of white glittering diamonds.

Geraldine, who had been unwearied in her attentions, now that her charge had so far recovered, was absent, and dame Maynard, her aunt, had for the last few days taken her place.

As the wounded stranger sat and gazed from the lattice, his thoughts seemed absorbed in other scenes and other days. "Winters of memory" seemed to roll over his mind as the big round drops coursed each other down his cheek.

Suddenly he rose from his seat, and paced the apartment.

"What is this?" he said to himself, "and why is this? Have I so long and so well borne up against adversity, and am I now about to break down thus? What, is this melancholy, this weariness, which now

seems to prostrate and destroy my energies ?”

The wounded stranger was still weak, and his wounds but beginning to heal ; but as he now began to consider the many matters he had on his hands, he resolved to leave his present refuge, and once more take the road.

Leaving the sick chamber the invalid accordingly sought the apartment where the family usually assembled.

There was a something about him which commanded so much respect, that all sprung to their feet when he entered, and even the old miller, blunt and unceremonious as he was, made his best bow as he rose and stood before him.

The traveller smiled as he took the Miller’s hand in his own.

“Nay, I pray thee, good Master Maynard,” he said, “let me not thus disturb you. Believe me, your guest is not one to call forth such a demonstration. I am but as yourselves, a plain and humble, but, I

trust, an honest individual. But a poor player, mine host; one, perhaps, you may have seen ere this in his vocation whilst fretting his hour upon the stage."

"A player, eh?" said the Miller sitting down again, with no little surprise depicted upon his round, red face. "A masquer, eh, a mummer? Well, truly, I have seen many a play when in London, and, by our lady, been well amused thereby. And so, then, your worship who we have been all along setting down as something great and grand is, after all, but a play actor, a mountebank eh?"

"Not so," said the invalid smiling. "We of the profession profess better things than that, good Master Maynard; we profess, indeed, to be 'the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time.'"

"Well, perhaps so," returned Maynard. "Howbeit, I profess not to understand such matters; nevertheless, I do love a good play with all my heart, and that's the truth. And so thou art a player, eh?"

"But a poor player as I said, mine host. One Will Shakspeare at your service. You may, perhaps, have heard the name."

"Why, eh, yes, truly I have heard tell of Will Shakspeare; who has not? Though for the matter of that, methought you had more to do with the courtly revels than with stage plays."

"Be that as it may, good friend," said Shakspeare, "I am come to thank you for your kindness and attention. To repay you now for a life saved, and subsequent hospitality is impossible. But I shall hope speedily to return and hold further converse."

"But thou art not surely going away," said the hospitable old miller, taking Shakspeare's hand, "thou art still weak as an infant."

"Nevertheless I must try and take the road as early as may be to-morrow morning," returned the guest, "if I can do so; and so, good night, good friend, and Heaven speed all here."

Shakspeare turned to re-enter his room, for he felt fatigued with the exertion he had made, but he again paused.

"There is one who I see not amongst you here to-night," he said, "and whose kindness I have missed for the last two days."

"You mean my niece, Geraldine," said the miller.

"I do."

"Well, truth to say she is absent just now. The great lady of the Manor House yonder hath sent for her to aid in the coming revels."

"Then I fear I shall not now have it in my power to thank her for her care in my illness."

"I hardly know about that," returned Maynard. "She goes and comes as she listeth, as the wind blows, as the saying is."

"Will you give her this ring when she returns?" said Shakspeare. "It is the only valuable thing the robbers overlooked."

The Miller took the ring, and looked at it

curiously. "I don't think she can accept this," he said, "'tis of value. These sparklers here must be diamonds, trow."

"Be that as it may, it is too poor a gift for all the service your niece has rendered me," said Shakspeare; "and I trust she will not so far disappoint me as to refuse it. Once more, good friends, adieu."

CHAPTER VII.

"So, so. A player, eh?" muttered old Maynard the miller, as, after breakfast next morning, he indued his cloak in order to proceed to the mill. "Who'd have guessed that, my masters all? Marry! I thought he was something grand, albeit his clothes were neither rich nor guarded with lace. A player; neither more nor less, eh! Will Shakspeare, too, only to think of that, dame."

"We shall miss him hugely," said the old dame; "I never waited on a sweeter tempered and more taking gentleman."

"Gentleman!" iterated the Miller, "didst say gentleman, dame?"

"Well, what else can I call him?" returned Mistress Maynard.

"A player, neither more or less. You heard him say as much himself, a masquer, a mummer, a writer of bombast, an inventor of lies to put into other men's mouths. Marry, I wonder what our doctor will say when he hears it?"

"And I wonder," said Hodge, "who will have to pay the doctor's bill for un, eh?"

"Why, of course, we shall have to do that, Hodge," said his brother George.

"Thou wert ever an ill-tongued churl, Hodge," said old Maynard; "an' if we do have to pay a few crowns extra will it hurt us, think ye? Will the mill wheel go less swiftly, or the mill dam run dry?"

"Perhaps not," said Hodge sulkily; "but, nevertheless, an' I had know'd the man we were housing and feeding was nought but a stage player, dang me, if I'd a been so ready to go on his fool's errands, to fetch his physic and all that. I hate stage players; they're nout but vagabonds at best."

"Ah! Hodge, Hodge," said old Maynard, "thou wert always a mercenary dog and a churl. I suppose thou thought the man was rich, and would give thee a noble or two for thy pains."

"Never mind what I thought," replied Hodge, "I think but meanly of him now at any rate. Ah, and here be Geraldine come back. Well, lass, thou hast returned sooner than we expected thee. How goes all at the Hall; are we to caper there on Christmas Eve, or what are to be the sports toward?"

Geraldine, who had just at that moment hastily entered the cottage, paid no attention to Hodge's words, but passed swiftly into the inner chamber, where their guest had lodged and gazed for a moment around its vacant walls. She then uttered a little exclamation, and clasped her hands.

"Gone!" she said. "Then it was really himself I saw as I looked from the window. Oh! that I had seen him but for a moment to say good bye."

As Geraldine spoke she darted towards

the table, where the wounded man had sometimes sat and studied, and from the floor, where it had fallen, picked up a small scrap of paper, with some newly written lines on it, and read these words :

“Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all,
What hast thou then more than thou hadst before ?
I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty ;
And yet love knows, it is a greater grief
To bear love’s wrong, than hate’s known injury.”

Again and again she read this fragment, and then she turned and joined the family party.

“Our guest it seems has left us,” she said to her aunt. “His departure was somewhat on the sudden. I would fain have seen him ere he went. Why did not one of the lads come up to the Hall ?”

“Well, thee didst certainly nurse and tend him. An’ if he had been thy brother or thy husband thou couldst hardly have done more than thou didst, lass,” said Mistress Maynard.

"Such a man deserves all the kindness and attention a woman can bestow," said Geraldine.

"Aye, and he showed himself grateful," said her aunt. "See, lass, he left this ring in my hands to give to thee."

Geraldine took the ring eagerly as the old dame held it to her, and carried it to the light. Her countenance brightened as she gazed upon it; she then put it to her lips and kissed it, and placed it on one of her fingers.

"Never to be removed whilst life lasts," she said; "and yet I would he had given me something of less value, a flower even would have been enough."

"Did he leave any message or word for me?" she inquired of her aunt.

"Why, yes; he did say a many things. His thanks, and a hope that he might some day soon see us again."

"Did he say what day he would return?" inquired Geraldine quickly.

"No," replied the aunt. "He said nothing about that."

"Thou seem'st mighty taken with this chap, methinks," interrupted Hodge. "Do you know what his vocation is?"

"I do," said Geraldine. "He told it me one day as I sat and watched beside him."

"Well, and what is it?"

"An actor at the Blackfriars Theatre, an author, too, writer of the plays he enacts in, and which have made such a stir in London. Nay, I have one here which I have read over and over again."

"Better read your Bible."

"I do read my Bible, as you know ; and next to it, for beauty of words and pureness of sentiments, this play seems to me to rank above all other books I have perused. Such noble sayings are, I opine, seldom to be found in books, as are to be found in this man's plays."

"Geraldine, thou art a fool," said Hodge, taking up his hat, "and ought to know

better than so to speak. The man's a player, true enough, one of those dissolute, fustian dogs, who are nightly to be found in Old Chepe. There's a tavern there called the 'Boar's Head,' where they all meet o' nights. Go there and ask for one Shakspeare, thee'll soon hear tidings of the fellow's doings there, and the roaring blades he consorts with."

Well did Geraldine recognise the name of the tavern her cousin had named, for she had wit enough, though a female and so young, to fully appreciate the scenes portrayed there in one of the plays she had perused.

She looked at Hodge with a look of most supreme contempt, turned from him and re-entering the inner chamber, slammed the door, as if she would say, "I will not waste another word on such an ignorant, vulgar brute."

CHAPTER VIII.

GERALDINE MAYNARD, as our readers may possibly have surmised, was quite a character in her way ; one of those gifted beings whose doings and whose apparently erratic style of carrying on and going on, would seem an enigma to the more staid and sober of the community at large.

She made some of the old hands stare when she took it into her head to surprise their weak minds ; whilst with the more juvenile amongst the neighbourhood, she appeared a sort of petty queen. To look at her as she walked the green, was to admire her.

“ Grace was indeed in all her steps,”

according to the trite saying, albeit her eye

had anything but "heaven" in it, if by chance one of her numerous admirers presumed to offend or to thwart her.

Amongst the village maidens, (although she was necessarily admired), she was not altogether a favourite, for whenever she so willed it, she could easily entame men's hearts to her worship. Like Perdita, she seemed "the prettiest low born lass that ever tripp'd the greensward."

"Nothing she did or seem'd
But smack'd of something greater than herself."

But was she a low born lass ? That was indeed *a question* ; for there was a mystery about her parentage which none, not even her accredited aunt and uncle could quite fathom.

The Maynards had dwelt upon the spot of ground they inhabited, and been millers there from the old monkish days. The title deeds by which they held the land they occupied, was as old as Alfred's day. Real old English yeomen they had been time out of mind ; never rising, never deteriorating ; always the

same, always millers ; constant to their trade, to their mill, and to their honest toil, as the old lichen-covered wheel, which daily revolved in the stream. Geraldine had been consigned to their charge when a baby. Brought from Ireland, where the miller's only brother had been serving, and had gained high repute as a soldier. He had married during the terrible struggles of that country, and lost his wife, it was supposed, after the birth of this child. During the Hags wars,* as they were termed, the infant had been brought over when but two years of age, and consigned to her uncle's charge.

Many an effort had the Miller made to trace out some of the mother's relations, after accepting the charge. But all had been in vain ; and thus the infant had grown up from year to year in that sweet locality, a petted, indulged, and truth to say, a somewhat wayward child.

To look at her dusky hair and flashing

* See "History of Ireland."

eye, one might have thought there was Spanish blood in her veins; especially when anything angered her, she looked like the daughter of some Hidalgo of the highest rank; whilst her form had that indescribable grace and contour which sometimes entrances, while it astonishes the artist or the limner's gaze.

Not a single youth of any grade or station, and she had seen many even of high rank at the neighbouring Manor House, had Geraldine ever stopped to give a passing glance at, or to think of for a moment. She sneered and laughed at the sex as unworthy of a young maiden's thoughts. Fine feathers and fine birds were as nought to her mind and eye, and yet she had oftentimes, from girlhood, stood in the old Hall of Walshingham, and seen some of the choice and master spirits of the age. Sidney, Surrey, Raleigh, Southampton—had she looked upon amongst the visitors there. But not one of them had made much impression on her youthful fancy.

Within the last few days, however, she

had tended upon one who had so utterly and completely impressed her with his deserts, his goodness, his wit, and his talents, that almost unconsciously she had become deeply impressed in his favour.

Prostrated, ill, nay almost dying, as she gazed upon his features she saw one for whom a woman might well care, whilst he remained to her, and whom she must remember and regret to the last day of her life if bereaved of his presence. A few hours in his company had indeed served to impress her with his merit, a halo seemed to hover around him; there was hot and fiery blood in her veins, and she fell headlong in love before she knew her danger; and then with her there was no pause, no stop; no after reflection; reason, all, everything was as nought, all else

“Fell into abatement and low price.”

* * *

A summons, or command, had taken her away, as we have seen, to the great House

of the village. Sir Francis Walshingham was about to hold one of the accustomed fêtes, which "ever 'gainst that season, "wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated," it was a time-honoured practice to hold in most of the halls and hostelries of import throughout England.

Geraldine Maynard had always been a great favorite with the great lady of the Manor House, and parts had been allotted her according to her age. Up to eighteen she had played in the various representations as the infant prodigy of the little world around; and since then she had danced and acted in several masques, and been for that brief hour the admired of the circle. Indeed, the scenic hour, as far as she had been an actor, possessed wonderful charms for the fair Geraldine.

The Miller's two stalwart sons, Hodge and George, were both secretly and deeply in love with their cousin. Somewhat loutish, standing upwards of six feet high, both these lads from their breadth of back and shoulder, and

their skill at quarter-staff, and all out-door exercises, might have kept the ring at Hexham. Hodge was but a louring, cunning, selfish, and half savage fellow at best ; but George was more open-hearted and generous. Neither the one or the other had however ever been graced by even a scattered smile, or a thought as far as their cousin was concerned. She looked upon them as clods of the valley, utterly contemptible in comparison to many she had seen ; nay, the mill horse, or even the donkey which drew up water at the old Roman well in the centre of the common, were nobler animals in her esteem.

CHAPTER IX.

It was whilst Geraldine Maynard had been engaged in hanging up holly and mistletoe in the chamber of Mistress Francis Walshingham, the daughter of the great statesman, that whilst casually glancing from the casement on that morning, she had beheld her late charge fully accoutred, but pale and weakly looking, slowly ride past.

The road to Richmond lay directly under the heavy stone balcony of the window, and at first she imagined she beheld an apparition. Gradually, however, she remembered that two days had elapsed since she had left her home, and then came the probability that her eye had not deceived her. At first

without quite knowing why, she felt both annoyed and depressed. She had nearly finished her task, and after rehearsal of her part in the coming masque, she was to have returned home. As it was, holly and misletoe, and masque and revel were at that moment as nought. She cast aside the shrubs in her hand, immediately sought out the old housekeeper, and giving her the keys of Mistress Walshingham's room, announced that she must at once return home ; where, as we have seen, she found her fears confirmed, and her late charge departed.

It seemed extraordinary to herself how utterly desolate, how utterly deserted all looked ; it appeared wonderful to her unsophisticated mind how in so short a time, and while she had been unconscious of its progress, her love for the society of this new acquaintance could have so grown upon her. The poet, for she was now well acquainted with all concerning his vocation, although she knew nothing of his antecedents, had certainly taken some little pleasure during his

enforced seclusion, and whilst companion'd by so sweet a creature, in trying his best to amuse and interest her ; and with greedy ears she had listened to and drank in his "honeyed sentences." How she had loved to look up from her knitting, and gaze upon his expressive countenance, whilst he read to her some passages he had suddenly conceived, and immediately committed to paper, she now more fully called to mind,

"'Twas pretty tho' a plague,
To draw his hawking eyes
In her heart's table ;
A heart too capable
Of every line and trick of his good favour—"

The chances were she might never see the poet again, or if so, that one so gifted would hardly cast a thought, or give a passing glance towards her ; yet still, *Farewell* was all she thought in her own mind that she wished to say ; nay, she felt that she must say that word, and that she must see him once more to say it. And what she had resolved

upon, that she had taught herself to consider as already achieved : and so after a few brief tears she quitted the apartment, and once more joined the family circle.

A large and brilliant assembly were expected at the residence of Sir Francis Walshingham, on Christmas Eve. All the quaint games and old world customs of the period were to be enacted there ; more especially so, as Her Majesty had signified her intention of being present.

Yet it only wanted one fortnight to Christmas day, consequently the preparations were being carried on fast and furious ; for when the Queen did signify a visit, she seldom failed to perform her promise, and any sort of defalcation or neglect in the ceremonious observance at the time, would be sure to call forth rebuke and royal censure.

* * * *

Where Her Majesty went, as a matter of course, whole battalions of court gallants were sure to be present, invited or uninvited, they " swarmed like summer flies," and although

most travel and traffic to and from London was performed in state barges and other boats and conveyances on the Thames, still it was customary amongst the better sort of cottagers resident upon the neighbouring common, to afford accommodation to some of the cavaliers of the Court,

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Shakspeare left the cottage of Master Maynard, he rode straight on through the forest to Richmond Palace, where indeed he had been due, when he was stopped, and as we have before seen, all but murdered. His visit, which was to Lord Southampton, (then in attendance upon the Queen), had been accordingly delayed ; and Lord Southampton felt deeply grieved as he observed the traces of severe suffering which the treatment he had received had left upon his outward favour.

“ You will scarce be able to attend the revels at Walshingham House, I fear, good Master Shakspeare,” said the Earl. “ They are close at hand. Let me see ; Christmas

Day is on the 25th inst., and it is now the 10th. What say you?"

"I trust I shall have quite recovered by that time," said Shakspeare; "especially as Sir Francis Walshingham has himself requested that I should be present."

"One of your plays is to be enacted on Christmas Eve, I rather think?" inquired Southampton.

"It is, my lord," returned Shakspeare.

"Which is it to be?" again inquired the noble.

"*'Hamlet,'*" replied the poet.

"Nay, then you *must* be present," said Southampton. "Indeed it was to talk with you on the subject of this fête, that I sent for you in all haste last week."

"My anxiety to obey your wishes," returned Shakspeare, "caused me to start late, even after I had played my part at the theatre. Hence I fell amongst thieves, as your lordship may perceive."

"Do you know, good Will," said Lord Southampton, "that I am much afraid you

owe some part of the mishap that has befallen to you, to your own doings."

"Indeed, my lord, how so?" inquired the poet.

"Why you see," said Lord Southampton, "those wonderful scenes that you have drawn. Those rare doings at Gad's Hill. Those passages between Fat Jack, and Prince Hal, and Poins, at which you have made us all laugh, till our faces have been as Falstaff hath it, 'Like a wet cloak ill laid up.' Those scenes," I say, "have turned the brains of some of our youth, and, consequently, we have gentlemen of the shade, and minions of the moon hereabouts in goodly number. Nay, I am told that this road, and all about Windsor, is especially haunted by these fellows."

"I fear then, I am much to blame," said Shakspeare.

"To blame," said Lord Southampton, "how to blame, good friend?"

"Why, if I have put it into men's heads to turn robbers and caitiffs for the nonce, much mischief will ensue I fear therefrom,"

Lord Southampton rose from his seat, 'my good friend,' he said, "you are not given to false modesty, or deceit; therefore I think my words have somewhat hurt you. Done wrong, quotha! No, no, Will, thou hast not, thou canst not do wrong. Let after ages tell that. This 'wide, this universal theatre,' as you yourself have worded it, will hereafter, and 'for all time' bow down and worship thy surpassing genius, my good friend. We, in these rude and unsettled times, have hardly leisure to appreciate, to stop and look upon thy doings. Yet, still thou dost delight us all—high and low."

Southampton paced the room, and looked out upon the silver Thames for a brief space, and then turned, and took Shakspeare's hand. "Yes, Will Shakspeare, poor as thou now seemest, when in after times, thy worth shall be truly found, thou, and thou only, amongst us all, will be "the great heir of fame." In future ages, I say, thou wilt stand hallowed in all men's eyes."

Shakspeare was moved; he bent his head

and a tear stole down his cheek. He returned the pressure of the noble's hand. "Thou hast ever been good and friendly towards me, my lord," he said; "had it not been so, I could scarce have thriven. Let my gratitude speak in my favour. I am poor in words, and yet I thank you."

* * *

As Shakspeare spoke, several of the nobles then in attendance upon the Queen at Richmond, amongst others, Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, and other courtiers entered the room.

"Ah, what Will, wondrous Will!" said Raleigh, as his eagle glance rested upon the poet; "art thou here! Fore heaven, I am glad to see thee! Why man, that last play of thine is more exquisite than anything thou hast yet done. I have been longing to see thee, and tell thee of the delight thou hast given us all. But you look ill, very ill. And now I look again, thy head, I perceive, is bandaged up."

"No more deer stealing in old Richmond

Park, Will, I hope," said Sir Philip Sidney, approaching in turn, and taking Shakspeare's hand.

"Not so," said Southampton. "The fact is, our good friend here hath himself raised some of the hornets that have stung him so sharply. Some 'gentlemen of the shade' hereabouts have assailed, and all but killed him a few nights back."

"But I have heard, Will," said Raleigh, "that these night-birds always respect thee. That thou ridest with 'the receipt of Fern seed,'* amongst the glades and woods; that the outlaws always pass and repass, and lift their hats even, but never stop to question the setter of exploits at Gad's Hill and Rochester."

"Such has been the case hitherto," returned Shakspeare. "This time, however, they have been anything but courteous."

"You will be present at Barnes I trow, good Will," said Sidney.

* Invisible.

"I trust so," returned Shakspeare. "For I have promised to preside over, and, if possible, play a part on that occasion."

"Truly, I am glad to hear it," said Sir Philip, "for, positively, we should be as naught without thy presence there."

* * *

The most accomplished gentleman in England, as Sir Philip was called, now seated himself, and the other nobles and guests doing the same, Shakspeare rose to take leave of "that fair companie."

"Farewell, Will," said Raleigh, "heaven speed thee. That island thou hast pictured in the 'still vexed Bermoothes,' and the scenes thou hast drawn there have enchanted me as though the very wand of old Prosper had touched my heart."

And then as he grasped the poet's hand, he repeated the words of Gonzalo in the newly written play of 'The Tempest.' A passage most peculiarly enchanting to such a man.

“ Had I the plantation of this isle, my lord,
I’ the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things ; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit ; no name of magistrate ;
Letters should not be known : riches, poverty,
And use of service none ; contract, succession,
Bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard none ;
No use of metal corn, or wine, or oil ;
No occupation—all men idle—all !
And women too, but innocent and pure ;
No sovereignty ;
All things in common nature should produce,
Without sweat or endurance ; treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have ; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind all foizon, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.
I would with such perfection govern, sir,
To excel the golden age.”

CHAPTER XI.

IN the pleasure gardens of Walshingham House, about the hour of seven P.M., a portly gentleman, accompanied by a companion neither so well equipped, nor so stately, nor so stalwart and handsome in person, being altogether as mean-looking as the other was noble and graceful, might have been seen pacing up and down a dark and secluded walk, which stretched for a considerable distance along the further extremity of the grounds.

The faces of the young Earl of Montfort and his secretary were grave, their talk low, and oftimes they stopped and faced each other during the progress of their converse.

"So, then," said the Earl, "this is another of the gipsey's dark deeds, eh? Truly the nature of the man is fearful."

"You may indeed say that," my lord, returned the other, "the poor wretch, I told you of, was found strangled in his bed."

"And his companions, Hall and Vipont?"

"Both were ordered for execution, my lord."

"On their parts deservedly," returned the noble, "they spoke treason, and had been heard to wish the Queen in Heaven. Let me see—did not this man Somerville marry the daughter of one Arden, a gentleman of descent and repute in Warwickshire; kinsman, as I have heard, to the mother of our pleasant companion and writer of plays, Will Shakspeare?"

"He did. Arden, also, had incurred the deadly hate of Leicester, for refusing, on some state occasion, to wear his livery; but more because he had the hardihood to gall the great man, by twitting him with his

addresses to some lady of the Court before marriage."

"A bold fellow that Arden," said the Earl, "his midriff ought to have been made of cast-iron ere he uttered a taunt of the sort to Leicester. Doth he still live, that Arden?"

"No, he is dead."

"I thought as much. His cup was drugged, I suppose?"

"Not so. His wife, daughter and sister, were thrown into prison. Arden himself was put to the torture, and afterwards executed."

"And the wife and daughter, what eventually became of them?"

"They were turned adrift after a time, as Leicester had contrived to seize upon all their lands; nay, they are supposed to have died miserably—of utter want, 'tis said."

"Execrable villain. And such then is the disposition of the most powerful noble in these realms. Truly, honest men are contaminated by his presence and companionship.

Yet can we not, nor dare we even attempt to curb his hateful career."

"Soft, soft, my lord, I pray you to speak under breath here," said the secretary, "the night breeze is hardly safe in these gardens. This man's spies are everywhere, and woe to those who offend against him but in thought."

"Tut, I fear him not, my good friend. Let but opportunity serve, so that I may set my rapier's point in opposition to his blade, and then let him look to himself."

"May the gods hinder that, my lord. Leave him to his own remorse, and to the vengeance of Heaven. Such a villain may thrive for a time, surrounded as he is with all the pomp and grandeur of the court. But, be assured, Heaven permits not such men to succeed ultimately."

"Have you seen those vast buildings in Warwickshire which he has added to the old towers of Clinton?"

"You mean the stately Castle of Kenilworth?"

“I do.”

“Truly I have not myself been personal there, but mens’ tongues speak wonders of their magnificence and the richness with which they are furnished. Nay, in other counties, too, hath this man managed to accumulate vast parks and manors. In few, his disposition is so covetous that the meanest possession of the poorest yeoman in the land, he would seek to clutch and pile up amongst his wealth.”

“And seeing such is the case, and knowing such is the case, is it not monstrous that nobles of the most exalted rank consort with, nay, would seem to tend the very footsteps of this all-powerful villain.”

“Place and greatness, my lord. Place and greatness. ‘The Queen’s name,’ as our poet worded it the other night, ‘is indeed a tower of strength.’ But let her favour once warp, and be seen to warp, and see then if he stand not forth, ‘the poor bare forked animal,’ he truly is. Had you and I but been better courtiers, my lord, our fortunes might have been as great

as that of many others we wot of, for what says our friend.

“ ‘ He who seeks and will not take when once ’tis
offered
Shall never find again.’ ”

“ Perhaps so, still I say nature has denied me the faculty of being a sycophant, I am not one of the reptilia, I cannot creep. Place and power unless derived from high desert would hang upon me like a reproach.”

“ I am glad to hear your lordship say so ; alas, these be times of import and terror. There is much in yonder house which it grieves me to see. Our host pushes his enmity against the Scottish Queen too far. Dark stories are abroad regarding plots entertained by him, and subornation of instruments to deal with her.”

“ No doubt. The Scottish Queen’s death is necessary to the safety of many now assembled in these halls ; what can Burleigh and Leicester, for instance—nay, what can our host himself expect, should the fates

lay our Royal Lady in the dust, and call Mary to the throne? The block, with short shrift; that they know, and consequently they labour night and day to persuade the Queen that it is incompatible with her own safety that Mary should live. Look you, we came here invited to festivities, to meet a goodly assemblage, and to revel in these halls, light of heart, and nimble of foot; yet see, the anxious conferences that have closeted our host and his fellow-statesmen ever since we came. Truly, the feast that is sauced with ceremony, and the host who is distraught and absent, make but a marred entertainment at the best; and my mind presages that this meeting will not be a merry one."

"Nay, but the revels are yet but in progress, my lord," returned his friend. "The Queen comes not till next week; the party are only half assembled, and those already come, not well assorted."

"Well, I know not," returned the Earl, "it may perhaps be as you say; still we have already a goodly company, and each

day more come ; yet somehow, I again say, that enjoyment, that easy style which should accompany a meeting at a season so hallowed, is not to be found here, at Walshingham House. But, come, let us extend our walk, the hot air of yonder crowded apartment hath induced me to invite you forth. Hark, the pipe and tabor. Let us go forth and witness the sports upon the common."

The Earl and his friend accordingly passed from the grounds of Walshingham House, and took their way towards the open common without, and where a goodly assemblage of the villagers were recreating themselves with all the unchecked and innocent enjoyment peculiar to that period. The young were romping and revelling, the more aged standing looking on in groups, and seeming happy amidst the enjoyment of their children and grandchildren. Others, again, were rehearsing the Christmas games which were so soon to be enacted at the mansion of the great statesman.

Pipe and tabor, drum and fife, sounded

too, as a company of Morescos or Morris dancers emerged from the adjacent village, and with quaint step and measured beat, the hawk's bells upon their legs and arms jingling in time, danced their merry dance, and wheeled and curvetted, and sang in chorus, and then struck their staves together to keep time to the melody.

* * *

The Morris dancers were picked and called from the best looking lads and lasses of the village. A goodly company—the men in tight-fitting jerkins which shewed their muscular forms to advantage; their nether limbs cross gartered, too, with bells attached, and their jovial, round, English faces beaming with hilarity and good humour. The lasses, too, in their short petticoats and kirtles green, so comely, so sweet looking, their eyes flashing out their merry thoughts. Lovely creatures to look upon, with forms of beauty, and features such as no other country but old England could produce.

The two cavaliers drew up and mingled amidst the spectators, whilst the shouts of laughter and the voices of the dancers, who kept up a sort of chorus to the music sounded around.

"This is true enjoyment," said the Earl of Monfort. "My long sojourn abroad has hindered my witnessing the sports of England, which I so well remember in my early youth. Welcome once more the Morisco and his quaint measure. But, I prithee, good Maurice, tell me the name of that sweet creature standing amongst the dancers."

"It is Geraldine Maynard, the niece of old Maynard, the miller here," returned his friend.

The young noble approached nearer, and gazed upon Geraldine as she tripped amongst the dancers, and then he accosted her and asked the favour of her hand.

Geraldine looked up in his handsome face doubtingly. The court noble, too, looked at the village maiden. He could hardly yet

comprehend the charm; was it in the expression, or the faultless form and feature? What eyes, what brows, what pearly teeth, what lovely hair! he thought, as she stood panting with exertion. Her very bodice seemed bursting, too, as she stood upon the green.

"Pardon, fair Sir," she replied after a slight pause, "methinks I may hardly take the hand of one I ne'er before looked upon, for surely such is not our custom here at Barnes. We dance with none unless we know them."

The young noble looked around. "Perhaps I may be able to find some one who can speak a word in my favour, sweet lass," he said.

"In that case," said Geraldine, "I shall be well pleased to accept you for a partner."

The young nobleman upon this stepped back to where he had left his friend, and asked the favour of an introduction.

"Call me by my own name, and omit

my title, good Maurice," he said. "I would rather not be an earl's son to-night, simply Alan Fitzurse."

CHAPTER XII.

“The measure done I’ll watch her place of stand,
And touching hers, make happy my rude hand.”

Such were the thoughts of him who wrote those words as he stood and gazed upon the dancers on this night, and whilst he watched Geraldine and her partner especially.

Shakspeare had a few moments before arrived from London, and stopped at the cottage of the Miller, in order to pay his promised visit; but finding the inmates were on the Common, he had followed them there.

As he stood and looked at the dancers, his eye followed Geraldine and her partner wherever they went.

“When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o’ the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that.”

“Your hand, fair maiden,” he said, as her partner after the dance brought her near to where he stood.

Geraldine turned, uttered a cry of joy, and sprang to his side.

“Ah ! what, my good friend and patient,” she said. “Did I not say you would come again to see us here.”

“To see your revels, my sweet and gentle friend,” said Shakspeare ; “though indeed I hardly expected to meet you here. I heard you were engaged at the great mansion yonder. But come you dance featly, and I must tread a measure with you.”

Geraldine was nothing loth, she took his arm as if he had been a brother, and soon afterwards joined the dancers.

The young Earl stood with folded arms where Geraldine had left him, and then he turned slowly and rejoined his friend. He felt piqued at the abrupt way in which she

had quitted him for a more favoured friend, but still found it quite impossible to leave the spot, and, accordingly, hovered near and watched her every movement as she threaded the mazy dance.

Meantime, as the dragon, the hobby horse, and other characteristic animals were capering about, several guests from the Manor House now strolled out upon the Common to witness the sports.

"Ha!" said Dee. "What my wondrous friend Will, art thou here, too? Well, I might have expected as much, for thou art ever where light-hearted revelry prevails. And my little Geraldine, also. Hast thou Geraldine Maynard for a partner? Prithee, good Will, have a care of her, for she breaks all hearts without remorse or dread."

"All but thine, good Sir," returned the miller's niece smiling; "grant me that, good doctor."

"And why not mine, sweet maiden?" returned Doctor Dee. "Why not mine as well as others, eh? I am but as other mortals, a poor weak, and debile minister, where eyes bright as thine prevail."

"*'Hei mihi quod nullum est amor
Medicabilis herbis.'*"

"Nay, but then you would call your philosophy (I think you call it) to your aid," returned Geraldine laughing; "and what could a poor village maiden do against your philosophy, trow?"

"Nay, then, you must ask your partner there," said Dee, "good Will. For doth he not say,

" 'There was never yet philosopher
That could endure the tooth-ache patiently,'

"and what should a poor mortal do when the heart-ache prevails?

" 'That immensity of woe.'

"But, no, no, Mistress Geraldine, Cupid is all armed and all powerful; we must all go down before his bow and his butt shaft."

The Doctor passed on, and several gorgeously apparelled cavaliers, who had been hovering near, now approached.

They were evidently somewhat flustered with flowing cups, and eyed Geraldine familiarly and rudely as they stopped before her. One, a tall, handsome man, but with a most sinister cast of countenance, abruptly requested her hand.

Geraldine looked at him doubtingly. She seemed half scared at his boldness; she

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"But, no, no, Mistress Geraldine, Cupid is
all armed and all powerful; we must all go
down before his bow and his butt shaft."

The Doctor passed on, and several gorgeously apparelled cavaliers, who had been hovering near, now approached.

They were evidently somewhat flustered with flowing cups, and eyed Geraldine familiarly and rudely as they stopped before her. One, a tall, handsome man, but with a most sinister cast of countenance, abruptly requested her hand.

Geraldine looked at him doubtingly. She seemed half scared at his boldness; she

placed her hand upon the arm of her partner, and seemed to cling closer to him for protection.

The cavalier laughed a rude familiar laugh. "Why you seem half scared at my ugly visage," he said, twisting his moustache. "Come, I must tread a measure with the prettiest lass in all England, so deny me not."

He put forth his hand to seize hers rudely, roughly. Her partner turned his arm aside gently, but with sufficient firmness to prevent Geraldine's hand from being rudely seized.

The cavalier stood back, and laid his hand upon the curiously hilted dagger at his girdle.

"How, Sirrah," he said, "darest thou brave a nobleman?"

"Not willingly would I do so, my Lord Rich," returned Shakspeare.

"How meanest thou then? I would fain tread a measure with this fair and exquisite maiden. How dare you lay a finger upon my arm?"

"The maiden shrunk from your touch," returned Shakspeare. "You are rude, unskilled in the way of virtuous females; she would avoid your company."

"Stand from before me," said Lord Rich. "I will demand of the maiden herself whether she declines my suit."

"I will decline it for her," said Shakspeare coolly, "both as her friend and partner. A virtuous maiden would be damaged by your company; suffer us to pass on."

Whilst this colloquy had been taking place, the companions of the cavalier, who, like himself, had a reckless, devil-may-care look, closed around the speakers, and now took part against the poet.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THRUST your dagger in his teeth, my lord," said one of the party. "These peasant slaves deserve to be cudgelled for their outréconductance."

The principal cavalier upon this drew his rapier, and without further circumstance, lunged straight at Shakspeare's breast.

The poet, however, was no youngster to be so dealt with. He was unarmed, having left his sword with his steed at the cottage where he dismounted.

But he put the thrust aside with his arm in an instant; sprang upon and closed with the young noble, and threw him violently.

"Our Warwickshire lads were ever good at a wrestling bout," said a stout, good-looking man, as he ranged himself beside the

poet. "We know the trick, eh, Will? Come I'll stand by you."

Lord Montfort, too, who had been standing near, now advanced and placed himself by Geraldine, who, as soon as Shakspeare had so quickly disposed of his antagonist, ran to and again took his arm.

It was well for the poet that these gentlemen did show a disposition to befriend him and his fair partner, for the whole company of cavaliers, feeling themselves shamed and aggrieved at the discomfiture of their chief, drew their rapiers, and appeared inclined to assail Shakspeare.

Lord Rich at the same time rising from his mother earth, rushed upon the poet.

Lord Montfort, however, now drew his blade and opposed him.

"How, Sir," he said, "drawn, and upon an unarmed man?"

"Stand back, my lord," cried Rich. "That hound shall answer with his life for the insult he has put upon me. Stand back, I say, lest I gall you too."

The fight now became general. My Lord Rich, a degenerate noble, whose youth had been passed for the most part in the company of Alsatian bullies, and amongst the riff-raff of the city, called upon his followers to aid him.

It was indeed the custom with men of his sort; desperate, daring, and lawless, to frequent the village fêtes round about London, where they generally managed to get themselves into trouble amongst the revellers by their insolence and assumption. They were the Mohawks of the day, and stood to no repairs during their outbreaks.

As there were some twenty of these swash-bucklers, headed by the young nobleman before named, they were rather a formidable body to encounter, and, doubtless, in a few moments would have summarily disposed of their opponents by trussing them upon their spit-like rapiers, and otherwise maltreating them.

The villagers, however, were generally upon the alert when such parties made their

appearance ; and accordingly Hodge Maynard and his brother George, with several others who had been following and watching their proceedings, suddenly thrusting into the fray, armed with their long heavy quarter-staves, resolutely attacked and beat the blades of these gallants about their own ears ; quickly disposing of three or four by laying them senseless upon the hard ground.

CHAPTER XV.

It was a merry night at the Miller's cottage after the before-named fray. As it was getting late, the sports and pastimes had now ceased, and the villagers and others soon afterwards withdrew to their different homes.

A goodly party were assembled around the Miller's hearth, for as he was ever a most popular host, and passing rich withal, at this genial time of year his house never lacked guests, or sack and canary, and good vivers to comfort them with. They sat around the ample hearth, the host and his good dame taking post on either hand in the cumbrous looking arm-chairs, which were always considered their especial thrones, and respected accordingly.

Shakspeare, who loved occasionally to

minge amongst the rustics as well as to associate with the magnificoes of our island, was delighted with old Maynard and his family, and as the cup passed round after supper was ended, and the wood fire cracked and crackled, his wit and his converse astonished the ears of his hearers, and made them laugh till they were fain to hold on together as they sat. All were in extacies of delight, save only Hodge, the Miller's eldest son, and not a wrinkle nor a wreath did his face display by way of smile.

He sat sullen and silent amidst the mirth and jollity around, and ever and anon shot a furtive glance at the poet, and then at Geraldine, who was seated beside him, and seemed buried in his own cogitations and thoughts. Jealous he certainly was, and that to a degree. The green-eyed monster had him on the hip, and "made the food he ate."

The gentle Geraldine sat next to Shakspeare, in the centre of the circle, and devoured every word he spoke. Such language, such

brilliant wit, such words as he uttered, she had never before listened to.

With the unsophisticated and innocent manners of her class, she put her arm through Shakspeare's; and whilst he spoke of something that deeply interested her, looked up in his face with eyes of wonder and admiration. To her he seemed to look "some bright particular star," and the mute wonder lurked in her ears to steal his sweet and honeyed sentences.

After a while he talked of old Stratford, and similar scenes he had mixed up in. He told what his father was, and how he had been driven from his home, alone, penniless, a wanderer, in the open world; and then he described his first taking to the theatre, and how he had thriven from time to time. All this and much more he told. But I am afraid that when the sly dog looked down and glanced at those beaming eyes, he quite forgot to say anything about his wife.

* * * *

Although the poor player, however,

talked, and talked so well, he knew the art of conversation too accurately to take more than his proper share in the converse. On the contrary, he drew the company out, and made them talk, too; and not a word, a look, or gesture, was lost upon that wondrous man.

He could suck melancholy out of a song, too, "as a weasel sucks eggs." And ever and anon he trolled forth some ditty he composed for the nonce, which whilst it was quite adapted to the hearers,

"Dallied with the innocence of love
Like the old age."

The jolly Miller quite altered his mind about stage players and stage plays.

"Fore Heaven! but this is a rare fellow," he said to an old crone who sat beside him. "Saw ye ever his like, Gaffer Skinflint?"

"Can't say I ever did see the likes o' him," returned Gaffer Skinflint. "He's rare company that's certain; my sides do

ache with laughing, as if they had been beaten wi' a cudgel."

"Hast thou ever seen him at the Globe Theatre, mate?" inquired another of the guests, aside.

"Never," said neighbour Suddle; "to my cost; never."

"Ah, then, go there, and see what rare entertainment is furnished forth by this man, and his yoke fellows. Fore me! but it's perfectly wonderful to witness their doings and to hear their talk."

"What! tell you me of their talk," said Dame Partlet, another neighbour. "Pretty talk did I hear some time ago. When I went up to visit Cousin Smalltrash, who lives in Bucklersbury, she, forsooth, would needs take me to the play,—and pretty things did I see there. Talk, quotha, I wish you could have heard and seen what I heard and saw."

"Well, what did'st hear and see?" inquired George Maynard.

"I saw a great fat man make a rare fool of himself; and then for lies, Heaven save

us ! it was enough to set one's hair on end to hear the lies he told, and the conceits he uttered. Oh, dear, oh, dear ! and then to see him swagger and ruffle about with the best in the land, too."

"Ha, ha, ha ! I cannot choose but laugh."

"Well, then, there was a 'oman, too, I cannot say a good 'oman, hostess of the tavern where this great bellied fellow used to lodge. Fine words did I hear her utter, forsooth."

"And did'st see nought else but this fat man and this 'oman ?"

"Oh, Lord bless you ! yes. I seed a lot of things, robbers, and outlaws, and kings and princes ; and then there were battles and rare work between whiles."

"Ah, I know where you are now, Dame Partlett. I went to see that play when I was in London. It was called the 'First Part of the Life of King Henry the Fourth.'"

"Well, I rather think it was," said another of the guests, "albeit I am sorry

it did not please thee, dame. Howsoever, it failed not to please plenty there. Her Majesty the Queen even found much to please her it is said, and rarely did herself and all the courtiers applaud and laugh at that fat knight and his companions. Ha, ha, ha! Lord save us, I cannot choose but laugh even now as I think o't. And much did Her Majesty say in commendation of his wit when all was done. Nay, I have heard it said, though I cannot say I know it for a fact, that the Queen's Majesty hath signified a wish that our friend here should indite another play, and make the fat man in love."

"How that is to be done," said George Maynard, "how so gross a character is to be made into a lover, I cannot well imagine."

"Ask the question of Shakspeare himself," said Mistress Maynard. "Twill serve to find whether the report be true or not."

"I say, Master Shakspeare," said old Maynard, "be it really true that Her Gracious Majesty hath ordered thee to write

us another play, and show us that fat old rascal, Jack Falstaff, in love?"*

"I hardly know," replied Shakspeare, "that I am at liberty to divulge the commands of Her Majesty to this company. Howbeit, as the request was made at the theatre, and before those assembled around, I suppose I may as well confess that it was so."

"Well, I be mortal glad to hear as much," said Dame Partlett; "and please Heaven I'll be there to see, an' I be alive and well. But, prithee, tell to me also, good youth, how you will manage such matters. Ha, ha, ha! fat Jack Falstaff in love. Oh, dear, oh, dear! again it makes me laugh to think of."

"Well, well, that do beat all surely."

"If sack and sugar and a fat capon is to be the main object of his desire," said George Maynard, "I can easily believe him to be

* Tradition of the origin of "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

deeply enamoured. But what sort of a woman old Sir John is to fancy, doth indeed seem to me also a marvel."

"Well," returned Shakspeare, "there certainly does seem a difficulty in such a matter. To find a Gill for this Jack is not easy. Yet I think I can see my way through the puzzle, inasmuch as I have some friends about Datchett and old Windsor who will be likely to help me out."

CHAPTER XVI.

As the clock from the old church now sounded one, the various guests rose, and donned cloak and hat, and took leave, all except one or two of the most intimate friends of the Miller's, and they drew closer round the hearth, and whilst the host prepared a fresh bowl of good liquor, and more chesnuts were placed amongst the embers, they seemed inclined to prolong the sitting till dawn,

"Now came in the sweet o' the night."

Shakspere seated in that chimney corner seemed as happy as mortal man could hope to be. We fear, indeed, the poet loved late hours and a long converse, and on too many occasions was fain to "revel long o' nights,"

when indeed his bed would have been more beneficial to his health.

But then the man must be excused, his disposition was so jovial, so genial, so happy, so "twice blessed." The elements seemed so mixed in him that we cannot choose but excuse his little faults.

He sat, we say, in the chimney corner, for the Miller had insisted upon his taking the great chair which was his own particular throne. A round table with massive legs was brought forward now the company was reduced, and as he ever and anon took chalice in hand and sipped the goodly brewage set before the party, he looked around with no small delight.

"Come thou monarch of the vine,
Plumpy Bacchus with pink eyne,
Cup us till the world go round,
Cup us till the world go round."

"Now, Master Skinflint," he said, after he had chanted this stave, "report says you sing a goodly song as well as drain a goodly

draught. Let us have a stanza from you."

"Mass, I fear I should never be able to please you, good Master Shakspere," returned Skinflint, "my voice is but rugged."

"Tush, man, I don't ask you to please us," returned Shakspere, "I ask you to sing."

"Well, then, I'll give you a verse written by one you know, Master Shakspere;" and then in very doleful tones he sang the following ditty:

"Hoyhe, hoyhe, for money, more sweeter than
honey,
Who will not for money take payne?
Each lord and knight for money will fight,
And hasyard to be slain.
Hoyhe, hoyhe, fore me, money's more sweeter than
honey.

"It waxeth of force that no earthly course
But embraces it out of measure,
The doctor, the draper, the ploughman, the carter,
In money have both joye and pleasure,
Hoyhe, hoyhe, for money's more sweeter than
honey."

"Ha, ha," laughed Shakspere, "by the Lord, you sing that song bravely, Master Skinflint; rarely, Master Skinflint, you seem to feel the force of the words, good Master Skinflint. I drink to thee, good Master Skinflint; mayst thou have money in plenty."

"Ah, well, so let it be; maybe I do sing the song well, maybe I doant. We all set store by the yellow boys, say what you list. My good old dame, Heaven rest her soul! was wont to call me a rare hoarder, a save all, that I would rob the deivel an' I could, and then she called me old sordid penny. But my old dame was mistaken. I want no men's goods, or moneys either, not I. What's mine own I'll hold fast to, eh, Master Miller. Am I not right, good Master Shakspere? Why then, say as I do, 'hoye, hoye, hoye, for money, for money, more sweeter than honey, than honey.' May we all have our pockets well lined."

CHAPTER XVII.

As Master Skinfint finished his song, dark December beat upon the casement, and the snow came driving in under the door. The wind, too, began to roar and rustle in the forest without, and a violent storm was evidently brewing up. The late sitters drew nearer and nearer to the fire as the sounds reached their ears. The out-door weather influenced the in-door listeners ; their hilarity ceased, they sang no more ditties, and their conversé took a more serious turn. There was something in the time of night which coupled to the rising storm without, led their discourse at once to more sombre matters—the times abuse, the danger which lowered from abroad ; and then their talk grew superstitious, and a sort of awe, peculiar to the age in which they lived,

crept over the whole party, as they listened to the roaring wind which seemed to come tearing onwards from the depths of Sheen Forest, and then to rush across the common in its furious career. They talked then "of graves and epitaphs," told ghost stories, when church-yards yawned and graves stood tenantless, when the sheeted dead "did squeak and gibber in the public streets." Plots too and rumours of plots were discussed under breath, and in fear, the which plots were attributed to the murderous machinations of Mary Stuart, and how it was rumoured that Burleigh, Leicester and Cecil were incessantly instigating the Queen to put that unfortunate lady to death. And then they talked of the poor Duke of Norfolk, whose dark hour also drew nigh. Presently as they paused in their converse, there came sounds which were not altogether caused by the elements. Distant voices, shouting to each other, came fitfully and at intervals. Then came the sound of hasty footsteps, evidently not far from the door. By and by they

re-passed, then returned, approached, and then the voices were again heard, this time close at hand.

"I saw him near this spot," they heard some one say. "Knock at the house; he may have taken shelter here."

No sooner said than done, the door was rudely assailed.

The Miller and his sons sprang from their seats. The sons seized their heavy staves, the Miller clutched the sword and target which always hung at the back of his chair.

"Who knocks there, at this hour? and what want ye?" he inquired.

"Open, in the Queen's name," said one of the out-door visitors. "We seek a traitor and a caitiff."

"Out upon ye, false knaves," said the Miller, "there ne'er came traitors within these doors. Stand fast, lads," he said to his two sons. "Strike home, an they be not good men and true. I am about to draw bolt and bar, and admit these customers."

As the Miller spoke he threw open the

door, and several armed men entered. They were evidently, as they stated, constables or officers of justice. They advanced into the centre of the apartment, after securing the door, took the light from the table and carefully scrutinized every face there.

When they came to the Miller, he looked at the officer who held the light to his face, steadily.

"Well," he said, "what make ye of us all, good man? Dost think anybody here fit for axe or cord? Does my visage please ye, anything like treason in it? if so, take it prisoner at once."

"No, no, good master Miller," said the head officer. "We know you for a good and loyal subject. But we are on the track of a desperate villain, a traitor I say, a Popish conspirator."

"A Popish conspirator, eh? and do ye expect to find him in my meal tub?" inquired Master Maynard sarcastically.

"We suspect nothing," said the officer. "We saw him a few moments back here

upon the Common ; nay, close to your door, and so thought that possibly he had taken shelter within."

"Traitors come not here," returned the Miller. "We are as you see, myself, my sons, and my guests. If you wish to search the house, you are welcome to do so. Traitors, quotha ! By're lady I have half a mind to give you a taste of my mill dam."

The chief of the party seemed to be rather put out at the old miller's indignation. He paused, and the old man struck his fist upon the table so violently that jug, and tankard, and chalice, and bowl, jumped again.

"Traitors in this house, eh ? fore me ! I again say you are over bold to surmise so much. By're lady, if you were not in the Queen's service I should not care, by the help of my sons here, to thrust ye all into my mill dam, as I said."

"The man certainly was seen close to this house," said the head-constable, and again the officer took up the lamp and glanced around.

"Who is this person?" he said approaching Shakspeare, and holding the light to his face.

"Ah, who is he? ha, ha!" said the Miller, chuckling; his round, red, fat face lighting up. "Ha, ha, who is he? and what is he, think ye?"

"How can I tell who and what he is?" said the officer; "not the man I seek, anyhow."

"He has done a few murders in his time too," said the Miller, winking his eye. "Killed a king or so amongst other deeds."

"What, this man?" said the officer. "Do you mean to tell me this man hath committed such deeds?"

"Yes: murder most foul," said George.

"Truly, then, his face belies him," returned the officer. "He seems a decent, honest gentleman as ere I looked on. Killed a king, eh?"

"Yes, killed a king," said George. "Hamlet, the Dane, fell by his hand. Why it's Will Shakspeare, of the 'Globe' and

Blackfriars. Don't you know Will Shakspeare?"

"Ah, indeed," said the official, taking off his castor. "Is this, then, Master Shakspeare? Well, he's no traitor, anyhow; nay, I honour and respect him for his good works. Your hand, good Master Shakspeare."

"Will ye search any further," said the Miller, "or will ye take my word for't? no traitors come under my roof, nor ever shall, if I know it. Perhaps you'd like to search my meal chest, as I before said."

"No, no, good friend," returned the officer. "I am quite satisfied, we must hence at once; I fear this caitiff has again escaped into the woods."

"Well, thou shalt not go without a draught of liquor, anyhow," returned the Miller. "Come, here's to thee, Master Graball, and more luck."

The men at arms took their liquor and departed; and the Miller and his guests resumed their seats and their converse.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SCARCE half-an-hour had elapsed after the departure of the officers, ere the party were again interrupted by sounds from without.

Footsteps, so faint and stealthy, that at first they could hardly be distinguished, although when first heard they were close to the door.

Some person evidently was without, and as the circle stinted in their talk, and paused to listen, a gentle tap was heard.

Again the Miller rose from his seat, and his two sons followed his example. Shakspeare turned anxiously, and set his cup untasted upon the table.

Something like a groan was now heard close to the door, and then another tap.

At that moment Geraldine re-entered the room.

"Good uncle," she said, "there hath been some one tapping at my casement. I heard footsteps, too, as if going round to the fore door.

"Aye, lass," said the Miller, "and they be here, too. Hark, again, some one is trying the door. Stand aside, George; some poor devil, perhaps, hath lost his way in the storm. We must e'en unbar the door again."

The old man once more drew bolt and bar, and a man almost fell headlong into his arms; and then staggered, like one intoxicated, into the middle of the room.

"Shelter! give me shelter," he said, "in Heaven's name!"

"What, hast lost thy way, or what is it ails thee, man?" inquired the Miller. "Fore me! but thou look'st uncommon bad."

"I almost die for food!" said the stranger.

Shakspeare, who had risen and taken the man's arm to support him, immediately poured out a cup full of liquor and handed

it to him, after seating him in a chair at hand.

"Thanks, thanks," said the stranger swallowing the wine. "Give me food, I say, for I am all but starving."

The gentle Geraldine, who had rushed to the cupboard the moment the man mentioned the word food, now placed the remains of a pastie upon the table, and commenced helping him to its contents.

The stranger ate ravenously, like one who had not tasted food for many hours.

Whilst he did so, the Miller seated himself and looked on with anxious and doubting looks. The stranger, indeed, seemed more like some hunted beast than a man. His clothes were torn and ragged, his cheeks hollow and cadaverous, and his long black elf locks hung down on either side his face.

The Miller, who had seated himself again, rose and approached his two sons, who stood beside the chimney anxiously watching the new comer.

"This is awkward, lads," he said, "I begin to suspect that this poor wretch is the very man the Queen's officers were in quest of."

"An' it be so, we are but lost sheep ourselves, father," said George.

"Aye," said the Miller; "ruin stares us in the face, boy, an' this man be a traitor and we harbour him or even succour him in the least."

"Fore Heaven! then I'll thrust him out o' the door in a trice," said Hodge.

"Would you thrust your dog out in this weather, and at this hour?" said Geraldine, who had joined them.

"An' he be a traitor to our lady the Queen, I would," said Hodge. "Why should we lay ourselves under imputation and get into trouble for a stranger, eh?"

"Because he is in want of our succour and assistance," replied Geraldine.

"Dost want to be hauled off to prison, lass, as a traitor thyself?" said Hodge.

"Aye, and all we possess here seized and confiscated," said the Miller.

"Still," replied Geraldine, "come what may you cannot turn this man out, be he whom and what he may. Nay, perhaps, after all, we are mistaken, and he is no traitor. Ask himself. The man, in spite of his tattered dress looks a gentleman; ask himself, uncle."

"Thou'rt right, lass," said the Miller. "I will ask the man himself."

"As if he would be like to tell you," said Hodge contemptuously.

The stranger, who had meantime satisfied his hunger, and seemed much revived and refreshed thereby, now rose from his seat and addressed the host.

"Thanks, generous Sir, thanks," he said, "for your timely succour. Hunted like a wild beast for many days, yours is the first threshold I have dared to cross."

"Thou art welcome to the food and shelter thou seem'st so much in need of, good friend," returned the Miller. "But,

somehow, I always like to know who and what my guests are. These be ticklish times we live in, and queer hawks are abroad. But now a party were here in quest of one under suspicion of treason, and otherwise obverse to the laws of the land. I trust thou art not he?"

"I almost fear to confess that such may be the case. Nay, now I have benefitted by your kindness, perhaps I had better withdraw, ere my presence brings ruin upon this house and all in it."

The Miller felt puzzled. There was something noble and gentle in the look of the fugitive.

"I cannot consent to turn thee out, and yet I cannot well lay myself under suspicion by harbouring one even suspected. What is thy fault?"

"My fault is nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No; save and except that I profess the religion of my forefathers, I am quite guiltless of all offence."

"But thou was't called a traitor awhile ago, by those who sought thee, here in this very house."

"I have been imprisoned and hunted as a traitor, yet still am I true and loyal as thyself. But enough of this, I thank thee for thy timely succour; again, I say, I must take to the woods like a hunted wolf."

"You will not let him go, uncle," said Geraldine, "on such a night, too, and whilst those who seek his life are close at hand."

"What can I do, lass?" said the perplexed Miller.

"Do," said Geraldine, "why, the man will perish in such weather. Give him shelter, rest and food. We have many places where he can lie secretly for days, both here and in the mill without."

Shakspere took her hand and kissed it. "Brave lass," he said, "how much I honour thee."

"What say you, Master Shakspere," said the Miller, turning to the poet, "I can

hardly give shelter to this man, yet cannot well deny it either."

"You can hardly refuse it, Master Maynard, and with a safe conscience, too," returned Shakspeare, "the poor wretch hath ta'en a hurt somehow. He seems at point to die! Nay, we are not supposed to know aught of treason or traitors either here. Life, mine host, life itself is at stake."

"The man must die unless he is cared for. Let him have my room and my bed for to-night," said Geraldine. "See, he faints even now. Prithee some of you help to convey him there. Ah, woe is me, Hodge, what a stupid dolt you are to stand there scratching thy great thick head, and you too, George. Take the man up between ye and lay him on my bed."

"Would I were sleep and peace—so sweet to rest," thought the poet, as he gazed upon her, and assisted to carry the fainting man into the inner chamber.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE morning following these events found the inmates of the Miller's cottage somewhat tired and out of sorts, in consequence of their late sitting and the carouse they had indulged in.

Master Shakspeare, who had not gone to bed at all, sat fast asleep in the chimney-corner; opposite to him was the jolly Miller. George, who had rolled himself up in a cloak, and lay upon the floor, with a log for a pillow, was also in the kitchen when the day dawned. Geraldine, who was ever an early riser, was the first to enter and commence putting things to rights, she rearranged the furniture, cleaned up the hearth, and like some sprite set all in order without disturbing the sleepers. Shakspeare was the

first to awake and rub his eyes and look around.

"Some pixie, some elf, or fairy hath surely been here, to sweep and clean the chamber," he thought, as his eye lighted upon Geraldine, who was still putting things in order at the further end of the apartment. "Ah! what, art thou up and about already, Mistress Geraldine?" he said.

"I love to see the sun rise and set, good Master Shakspeare," said Geraldine, "your words in the play are ever present to my thoughts when I behold the breaking day."

"What words are those?" sweet Geraldine, inquired Shakspeare.

Geraldine smiled, and repeated the lines from Hamlet,

"See the morn in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill."

"What, hast thou read that too?" said the poet, who was delighted to find how greatly Geraldine admired his plays, and then he added, "but that will hardly suit

such a winter's morning as this, good Geraldine."

"Not exactly," said Geraldine, "but I can find a line or two descriptive even for this morning too."

"You bear a brain, good Geraldine. What are they?"

Geraldine sang in a sweet voice the now well known lines,

"'When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom brings logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail.'

"There what think ye of my memory, eh?"

The Miller started up and rubbed his eyes.

"Hallo! what, is it so late that you waken us up with a song?" he said.

"Certes 'tis not very early, uncle," said Geraldine, "but then you sat late last night."

"To go to bed late is to be up betimes," said Shakspeare; "but prithee, good Geraldine, tell us how your poor patient is this morning, that is, if you have seen him."

"I have both seen and taken him something to cheer his spirits," said Geraldine, "he seems much recovered, and talks of rising from his bed."

"Nay then, I will myself go and see him," said the Miller; "come, Master Shakspeare, let us e'en go and see to this guest, who hath come to us like some tempest tossed bark amidst the wind and the storm."

"Why, the Gods have surely made thee poetical this morning," said Shakspeare, following his host.

"Nay, thou mad wag! 'tis more thy converse than anything else," returned the Miller, laughing.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN they entered the chamber where the fugitive lay, they found him much recovered. Rest and sleep had done wonders for him, and although adversity and trouble had written "strange defeatures in his face," they saw before them a very noble-looking and handsome man of some two-and-twenty years of age.

"Thee bee'st another man this morning," said the Miller, "and I be right glad to see thee so far recovered."

"Thanks to thine and thy daughter's care," returned the fugitive, "I feel so well restored, that I will rise and take the road as soon as may be."

"Hereafter about that," said the Miller, "this is but a rough morning for the

soundest amongst us to be out. What say you, Master Shakspeare," he continued, addressing the poet, "we must still succour the unfortunate as we best can. Come on't what may, I will befriend this poor gentleman. Thee cans't rise if thee bees't really able, friend, I will send my son George to help thee, whilst breakfast is preparing. Fore me, Master Shakspeare, this is a rough morning indeed. Didst ever hear how the storm doth roar and beat without upon the casement."

"Still I must hence," said the stranger, "for every hour I spend here is fraught with danger to thee and thine."

"Well, well," said the Miller, "get thee on thy cloths, and come and warm thee. Anon we will hear thy story, man, an' thou list to tell it. And then we shall see what further we can do to aid thee. There is one here who I would fain be without in this extremity," said the Miller aside to Shakspeare, when they returned into the principal room.

"You mean Master Skinflint?" said Shakspeare.

"I do. He is but a prying, sneaking hunk at best. How I am to keep this matter from his knowledge I hardly know. Surely he is not yet up?"

"Yet must it be done," said Shakspeare. "Why not make a miller of the fugitive, eh?"

"By the Lord, lad, thou hast spoken well. Ha! ha! come with me to the mill and let us see to it at once. A good wash we must have after last night's bout, and then to breakfast."

* * * *

It was indeed a rough morning, as Shakspeare and his host donned cloak and hat, and sallied forth. The wind was so powerful that it almost forced in the door in spite of their joint efforts. When they opened it the snow too stung their faces, the sky was dark, and lowering as a pall, and all around seemed bound down by the ice and snow.

The Miller beat his arms over his stalwart

breast, and Shakspeare blew his fingers as they hurried onwards.

The mill was not very far from the cottage, and yet such was the fury of the elements, that once or twice the Miller stopped and felt half inclined to return.

When at length they got there, they found the mill wheel frozen in the stream, the ice as hard as hammered iron. But more than that, they found that two of the men-at-arms who had visited the cottage the night before, had been left there in order to keep a look out, as the officer in command felt sure the fugitive could not be far from the neighbourhood.

Old Maynard was somewhat annoyed, but put a bold face on the matter ; and after himself and guest had made a hasty toilette, ordered a couple of his men to bring some sacks of flour, and leave them in the porch at the cottage.

"The plot thickens, Master Shakspeare," he said. "To think that I, who have ever borne a bold face in the world, should turn

pale at the sight of those hang-dog looking officers. To think, Master Shakspeare, that I, of all men, should be necessitated to shuffle and to lurch about thus. 'Tis somewhat hard, eh?"

"'Tis in a good cause, Master," returned the poet; "but truly you must know this man's story ere you give him further protection. Your duty towards your family demands that."

* * * *

When they arrived at the cottage, they found the inmates assembled at the morning meal. Indeed, it would have astonished a modern guest to have seen the quantity of things furnished forth. Eggs, cream, milk, beer, ale, wine and sack, neats' tongues, sheeps' tongues, calves' feet, bacon, venison, all were there, but neither tea nor coffee. The Miller touched his son George upon the shoulder. "Our guest of last night hath not yet come forth I see."

"No, but he is about to rise," said George.

"Go, get one of thy ordinary coats, lad,

and take it to him. He is not quite so big and burly as thou art, but we must have him equipped otherwise than he came here. And harkee, George, have a gaberdine handy, too, anon I'll tell thee more."

The Miller now took his seat at the table, and the assemblage following his example, set to work at the viands before them. It was a good and substantial meal in the house of one of England's stout yeomen. The churlish chiding of the winter's wind without doors, and within—ah! what was within doors?

SHAKSPERE FOR A GUEST.

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER the meal was over, whilst the several inmates went to their various vocations, albeit the weather almost hindered all out-door exertion, save to bring more logs and gather in more fuel. The host invited the fugitive to give him so much of his story as might serve to show how far he could aid him further.

“Why thou shouldst be hunted like some obnoxious animal, an’ it be as thou sayest, that thy fault is nothing, I cannot exactly comprehend, good master.”

“My name is Rookwood,” returned the fugitive; “my story you shall have as briefly and as truly as may be. In the first place, then, you are to know that I am a Catholic. The confession will not, I fear, make my

presence here the more agreeable in your eyes. Nevertheless, I must e'en tell the truth."

"Well," said the honest Miller, "in sooth I must needs confess that I had rather thou hadst told me thou wast a Protestant. Howbeit go on in heaven's name, friend, and let us hear more. Rookwood, eh? methinks I have heard that name before."

"The Rookwoods of Norfolk are well known," said the fugitive. "I myself succeeded about a year ago to the estate of Ashton Hall in that county. On occasion of her Majesty's visit to a neighbouring noble whilst in Norfolk, I, one day to my surprise, received intimation that I should be honoured by a visit in her homeward route. I need not tell you that these visits of the Queen are oftentimes attended with ruinous expense, and sometimes also with evil consequences to her entertainers."

"I think I know that," said the Miller. "Witness the mighty preparation and waste that is going on now up at the Manor House

yonder, where she is expected in a day or two. See, I say, what it must cost Sir Francis Walshingham even when the Queen only stays a few days in his house."

"Her Majesty staid two whole weeks in my house," continued Rookwood. "Unlucky was the clock that struck the hour in which she came."

"Hold there, Master Rookwood," interrupted the Miller. "I will hear no word in disparagement of our gracious Queen."

"Far be it from me to utter such word," said Rookwood, "but of some of the syco-phantic miscreants who surround her throne I have no words bad enough. Suffice it to say, that as far my means went I spared neither pains nor money to entertain her Highness and followers. I had, as I said, but just succeeded to the estate. I gave freely. I gave all I could to all there; nevertheless my being a papist, as they were pleased to term me, marred all. Nay, her Majesty at her departure expressed the gratification she had experienced in my house

and in my domain ; where indeed she and her followers killed twenty-seven stags in one day, not to mention others which her foresters and huntsmen fairly stole and havocked. Suffice it, her Majesty thanked me at her departure, and even gave me her hand to kiss. But no sooner was she gone, than I received a message to tell me that I was a prisoner in my own house, and must expect an immediate visit from an officer sent by the Lord Chamberlain. Hardly had I received this message, when an armed party entered my dwelling, under pretence that I had been excommunicated for papistry, and was a dangerous subject, who ought never to have approached the presence during the royal visit."

"Methinks that was but a strange return for a fortnight's hospitality," said Geraldine.

"Hist, lass, hist," said the old Miller, "make no comment, such words are dangerous."

"Being thus pronounced by my Lord Chamberlain a dangerous companion and unfit to be at large, these harpies, these fol-

lowers of royalty sacked my house, and after cooking up a charge of treason against me, in consequence, as they affirmed, of certain papers they discovered, they forthwith carried me to prison. Such then, mine host, was the offence committed by me. Innocent and unoffending I was cast headlong into a common gaol, my only fault being my adherence to the faith of my ancestors."

"Doubtless," observed Shakspeare, "the Privy Council are more chargeable with this act than Her Majesty."

"Nay," said Rookwood, "I can easily believe that Her Majesty knew but half of what was done. I was represented as a papist, a villain, and one mixed up in plots to assassinate her; consequently when I succeeded in escaping from Norwich gaol, which I did a few weeks ago, I was hunted through the country like some beast of prey. A relative, of the same persuasion as myself, gave me refuge for a few days, but being discovered in my retreat I was nearly captured. I escaped, however, into the forest

of Sheen, where for the last two days I have been almost without food or shelter ; last night I was hunted to within a few paces of your door, and but for your timely succour must have perished."

This relation of the poor outlaw's persecutions and the grievous wrongs he had suffered, moved the hearers in his favour. Nay, the ill consequences that had ofttimes resulted from Elizabeth's unwelcome visits were well known, as also the dismay which was often experienced by her loyal subjects at the bare idea of such compulsory honour.

"Come what may," said old Maynard the miller, "thou shalt not be turned out of my house, good Master Rookwood, if I hang for it ; thou shalt have succour and concealment here till opportunity serves to aid thee to get across the seas. Fore Heaven ! an' it be so that our nobles return evil for good in such fashion, and in the Queen's name seek to spoil and kill honest and God fearing men, be their creed what it may, old Maynard will neither aid or abet such villainy."

“There spoke, my own dear uncle,” said Geraldine putting her arm round the old man’s neck and kissing his cheek. “We must try all we can to get Her Majesty to pardon this poor gentleman; they say that the Queen can do no wrong.”

Perhaps the poet, who stood by and heard this hope of the innocent Geraldine’s, might have thought of the words he had himself indited not long before.

“Oh, how wretched
Is that poor man, that hangs on prince’s favours !
There is, betwixt that smile he should aspire to,
That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
More pangs and fears than wars or women have ;
And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE morning which followed the events we have recorded in the former chapter, shone out in smiling contrast to the awful storm of the day before.

'Twas like the shifting scene in a modern drama ; all around glittered and gleamed in the bright sun, the trees, the icicles, the frosted grass, the sloping roof of the cottage and Manor House—all sparkled in the bright winter's sun.

The Common, consequently, was again alive at an early hour with villagers and visitors. Her Majesty had arrived late the night before at Walshingham's house, which in consequence was filled from garret to cellar with her attendants and men-at-arms, and those who had been invited to meet her.

Great sports were expected upon the Common, too, where the bull and the bear were to be baited, wrestling, and Christmas games of all sorts were to take place, together with all kinds of noon-day diversions, in case the maiden Majesty of England chose to view the sports toward, so that all around, peer, peasant, gentle and simple, were full of hilarity and boisterous glee.

Meantime, Master Maynard the miller, and all beneath his roof, who wished to befriend the fugitive Rookwood, were now considering amongst themselves how best to carry out their charitable intent. After a long consultation, it was resolved that for the present he must remain an inmate of the cottage at all hazards; and at opportunity, either George or some one else was to go forth and find a ship about to cross the Channel, and then return and convey him on board. Master Maynard kindly undertaking to find the needful for such venture.

Early on that morning, however, they

had received a very sufficient hint, that they must use the utmost caution in all they attempted. The two men-at-arms who were stationed at the mill, took it into their wise heads to make a visit to the cottage; they seemed to suspect something, they hardly knew what, and whilst the inmates were seated at breakfast, they knocked at the door. At the first rude summons for admittance Geraldine, who had ran to a small window and reconnoitred, gave the alarm. The Miller immediately threw Master Rookwood one of his well-worn and well-floured gaberdines wherewith to equip himself, and Geraldine as quickly ran to the meal tub and covered his face and hands with flour, so that the sometime outcast looked, as he stood beside the table when the two officers entered, a very able and stalwart miller's journeyman. Master Maynard affected anger at the intrusion as soon as these somewhat rude officials entered.

"Now what's ado, mates, I should like to know?" he said, "that my house is to be

be scrutinized after this fashion ; last night I was sufficiently ransacked and rummaged by your party, and this morning you must be thrusting your ugly presence upon myself and family. Who and what do you want here, I again repeat ?”

“Be not angered,” returned one of the men ; “we are bound townwards this morning, and have merely paid thee a visit in passing. Certes, one of my men did say that last night, as he made his way to the mill during the storm, he saw thy door opened, and by the light he could discern a man’s figure entering here.”

“What man of mine says that ?” returned the Miller in assumed anger. “Was it that man ?” pointing to the disguised fugitive, who was now employing himself sweeping up the hearth, “or who was it ? Fore me ! but I’ll discharge the knave an’ I find him out.”

“It was one of the men up at the mill yonder,” said the officer.

“He was a fool, then, for his pains,” re-

turned Maynard. "Let's hear no more of such trash ; but come, what will ye take by way of refreshment ere you go ? Here, Geraldine, lass, quick, give these honest men a cup of ale, they are, doubtless, anxious to be gone and to pursue their search. An' they be as anxious to be gone," he added aside to Shakspeare, "as I am to get rid o' them, they'll not be long about it."

So saying, Master Maynard pledged them in a cup, and sped them on their way, as if it was a matter of course to get rid of them.

"Fore me ! but they keep close upon thy track, Master Rookwood," he said ; "you must keep within here, and have a care of thyself, or they will have thee yet, for all thy whitened visage and smock-frock."

Whilst he spoke, Master Skinflint, who had been standing unobserved and unthought of, very quietly stole out as soon as the officers quitted the cottage, and quickly overtook them.

"Did not I hear something about a reward offered for the head of this Rookwood ?" he inquired.

"You did," returned the officer. "My Lord of Leicester hath offered a reward for his apprehension."

"He has, eh?" said Skinflint chuckling. "Good morning to you, gentlemen. It's somewhat cold, is it not? I'll e'en pay a visit to the Manor House an' such be the case."

So saying Skinflint turned his footsteps towards Walshingham House, and made diligent inquiry for my Lord of Leicester there.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OUR scene now again shifts; and from the interior of a rural cottage in old England, during the reign of one of the most extraordinary and gifted women that perhaps the world ever saw, takes leave to introduce the reader into the presence of that woman herself. To change, we say, from the ample kitchen of a yeoman's cottage, where it has hitherto been our purpose to shadow forth the deeds and doings of the inmates thereof, and show them as well as our pen can picture the scene, the gorgeous grandeur of

"The presence strew'd."

It is Christmas Eve—a period in those times all hallowed, and all enjoyed—Christmas Eve.—Even now in these latter days of utili-

tarianism, we feel something indescribably cozy and a bursting forth of hilarity and joy, and good fellowship at the approach of that night of nights.

From the cottage interior, hung around as it is with fitches of bacon, hams, tongues, and dried meats, its walls, too, shining with copper saucepans and culinary utensils, and its inmates again seated around the blazing fireplace, our readers are invited to view the Hall of Walshingham Manor House.

* * *

It is seven by the turret clock at the gatehouse. The day has been passed in feasting, and all the diversion and divertisements it is the peculiar pleasure of that queen of queens to exact from her entertainers. Herself the greatest actress amongst that acting throng. The Court have now assembled in the great hall to witness another and a most delightful treat—

“There is a play toward.”

It is the scenic hour of that wondrous

mortal, who, little in comparison as he was then thought of or esteemed, is now the most honoured, the most worshipped, the most adored of human creatures. He is there himself; having been invited, or commanded rather, to attend the representation of one of his own productions, only just written, nay, hardly to be called fairly indited or existing, save in the memories of those actors who have learned their parts from scraps copied from the original MSS, now lying about and all but lost behind the curtain of the extemporized stage erected for the nonce.

On a throne, which had been reared in the centre of the great hall, sat that remarkable woman, the last and proudest of the Tudor sovereigns—Elizabeth of England. Around and about her were to be seen, also, men whose names have ever since been renowned in the world's history as unsurpassed, nay, unequalled in any age—Sydney, Raleigh, Burleigh, Bacon, Walshingham, Southampton, &c., were on either hand,

their faces turned towards, and their eyes ever and anon dwelling more upon that singular countenance than upon the performance which was taking place.

It was a brilliant scene; lights which gleamed from large tapers which stood in elaborately carved candlesticks and sconces, stood beside the tapestried ornaments of the walls, amidst holly and misletoe, and numerous winter greens of other sorts. Men-at-arms erect as the steel battle-axes they held, stood sentinel on either hand of the raised and temporary stage upon which stood and walked and acted some of those men whose destiny it was to perform under the tuition of Shakspeare himself, the dramas he had so lately produced.

Meantime, a bevy of fair dames, bright and beautiful as the morn, also stood around and near the throne—the Ladies Bedford, Suffolk, Derby, Richmond, Effingham, Herbert Howard, Walshingham, Bevil, and others helped to make up that remarkable audience.

Besides the cavaliers, so renowned, so handsome,

“Glittering in golden coats like images,”

so magnificently were they apparelled—in converse with Her Majesty stood, Le Mothe Fénélon—the French ambassador, and other foreign nobles; nay, even in the midst of the performance, and during the intervals between the acts, Her Majesty was fain to hold converse with this ambassador upon state matters connected with her own kingdom and all and sundry, concerning also the “ancient Royaume of France.” But more especially did she like to dally with those foreign ambassadors upon the subject of the various offers of marriage then so continually in contemplation, and even to turn into ridicule the various candidates that offered, or were offered, to her. Nay, she scrupled no more to discuss the personal defects of a son of France, than she would those of a favourite dog or a pet monkey.

“By God’s passion, my lord,” she said to Fénélon, (we fear her Majesty, like her august father, used some terrible oaths), “we feel ourselves aggrieved instead of complimented in this new matter you have brought before us. The Duke of Alençon herein sheweth a bold face, methinks, to come into the field with so blemished a countenance as report bespeaks him to have. The scars of small-pox, my lord—at least so I am informed by my Lord of Leicester here—hath unseamed his visage after the most cruel fashion.”*

Fénélon looked daggers at Leicester, who twisted his moustache, and smiled contemptuously.

“Besides, my lord,” continued the Queen, “he is much too young for us; so that what with his immature age, and the scars of the small-pox—with such blemish, I say, I could by no means entertain the little man.”

To this the wily ambassador urged that

* This Duke was frightfully disfigured and very diminutive.

her gracious Majesty had enough beauty for both, and that the youth of the royal suitor need be no impediment.

“Ma foi!” said the statesman, “too young, say ye? Bien, what of that; is he not growing older every day he lives? And as for the scars of small-pox,” he continued laughing. “I value them not a jot; the Duke will soon have a beard to hide them.”

“Enough, enough,” said her Majesty to this last sally; “an’ it be as your Excellency says, namely, that thou canst not bestow sufficient praise upon ourself, considering the merit thou hast already discovered both in our heart and understanding. It seemeth but meet that you should wish to couple such merit with one more worthy. But enough of this,” she continued; “see the performance is going on again. I would fain see what more our worthy poet hath in store for us. Listen, my lord, to this:”

“What a piece of work is man: how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties; in

form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals. And yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so."

Her Majesty seemed to incline her ear to these lines as if they had been music.

"Truly, Sir Philip," she said to Sidney, "this is wonderfully fine. You who are a poet yourself must feel it so."

Sir Philip did feel it.

"I fear," continued the Queen, as the play proceeded, "that our poet here is ill content with the world; his heart must have been ill at ease when he indited those lines."

"Your Majesty," continued Sir Philip, "hath yet to learn what a pleasant fellow and glorious companion this Shakspeare is. Indeed, I cannot altogether away with your Highness' idea, that he is at outs with the world."

"Why look you," returned the Queen,

“ what went before could hardly have been conceived by one not ‘awearied of the world.’ Let me see, how went the lines ?

“ ‘ How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world !
Fie on’t ! oh ! fie. ’Tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed ; things rank and gross in nature,
Possess it merely.’ ”

The Duke de Montmorenci, and the Count de Foix, both of whom had come over to England officially to make offer of the youthful Alençon, professed themselves highly pleased.

“ Oh, dat vas vera fine,” said Montmorenci ; “ dat flat unprofitable jardin full of de veeds ; eh bien, my Lord of Walshingham, you would not like dat. Ma foi ! your jardin is most beautiful, magnifique, sometink like de splendide jardins at Fontainebleau and Chambord. By de vay, dere is von ting I must speak vid Monsieur Shak-à-dspère about. He makes de ghost of de old King say dat ven he vas sleeping vidin his orchard

in de afternoon, dat his broder poured de cursed hebanon into his ear. Ma foi ! I did not tink in so cold a counterie de king would be very likely to sleep every afternoon in an orchard. Eh bien, Messieurs, what you tink of dat ? am I right, Sir Philip ?”

“ Eh, ah ?” returned Sir Philip, “ by my fay, you are a very excellent critic, my Lord Duke. But in sooth you shall find the most monstrous and incongruous matters connected with our present dramatic representations. By’re Lady, a man had need to draw upon his spirits, and his imagination too, for scenes the which else could not be demonstrated to his optics, look you.”

Sir Philip paused, and addressed himself more particularly to her Majesty, who always lent an attentive ear when he spoke.

Nay, we fear Sir Philip, although it has been said he stood for the picture Shakspeare drew when he described the perfection of a gentleman, the glass of fashion, and the mould of form—the scholar’s eye, tongue, sword ; with all this we fear Sir Philip was at

this time a fop of the first water. A very fine gentleman as could be, but still somewhat of a lisping affected fantistico.

"Your Majesty shall understand," he said, "that in a drama of the present time a man may be supposed to see many curious matters : par exemple a bevy of fair dames may possibly be in the act of plucking flowers ; then your Highness must think the stage a garden ; by and bye you may hear news of shipwreck in that very place ; then would your Majesty be to blame an you accept it not for rocks, shoals, and tempest. Nay, two armies may possibly be represented by some half a score of swords and bucklers, and there you have a pitched field ; nay, two young princes may even fall in love, marry, and have children ; those children may grow up, fall in love in turn, and so following, and all this in the space of two hours."

Sir Philip was so far right in his descriptive oration, inasmuch as time and space were necessarily taken unwarrantable liberties with at this period. Painted scenery and

shifting scenes were unknown, and in order to indicate a place where a scene was supposed to occur, a board was hung up with the name of the place written thereon, and so changed with each changing scene.*

Our readers have doubtless surmised or seen that Hamlet was the play performed on this night.

When anything went wrong, or angered

* Indeed, in consequence of the small stages upon which the actors had to perform, description had to do the work of space.

"Come on, Sir," exclaimed an excited combatant in one of the dramas of the olden time, "will you to the town end to the place of appointment?" and the challenger immediately adds, "Now, sirrah, here we are at the town end. How say you, will you draw?"

Perhaps we, of a later time, ought to congratulate ourselves upon this want of scenic effects and properties, for to it we are indebted for many of those magnificent descriptions of our great poet, who would seem to have taken such pains to appeal to the imaginations of the audience for lack of the scenery which, however rude, would have given demonstration to the eye.

the Queen, or called forth her attention, she scrupled not to interrupt, break off, and fling out like the player king in the very drama before her.

“Give o’er the play. Give me some light.”

In the present instance some such interruption had taken place, not so much from any “conscientious prickings” on the part of the Queen, as from some of the jealous twinges she was accustomed to feel, and also from some real twinges which she felt in her royal jaws. In fact, her Majesty on this night was ill at ease from many causes.

“Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.”

Nay, at this period of her reign, “a hundred businesses were brief in hand;” but more than this, than these, than all, her Majesty on this night, as before hinted, was suffering from that base, common, and popular pain, the tooth-ache.*

* Queen Elizabeth was frequently so distempered with the tooth-ache that it caused quite a sensation amongst her courtiers when such fits came on; so terrible was her temper under the suffering.

Meantime the play of the great poet, and which cut and curtailed to suit the occasion, had been acted, and he himself called to the front in order to receive personally her Majesty's congratulations and expressions of satisfaction.

The great poet, then the poor player, had accordingly bowed, received his "guerdon, his remuneration," in the shape of some laudatory words from that proud and eccentric woman; whilst the haughtiest circle of nobles and courtiers that ever stood around a throne, reared their proud forms on either hand, and looked down upon one so immeasurably their superior, as he bent the knee in homage.

This complimentary ceremony, we say, having been gone through, a smaller divertisement was to follow, a sort of masque, in which were introduced various nymphs and their swains; and in a dialogue wherein a Silvan held converse with a beautiful nymph, her Majesty became so fidgetty and irritable that she abruptly cut short the performance.

The fact was, that in this minor masque which had been intended to fill up the hours till supper was announced, Lady Walshingham and her daughter had enlisted the services of Geraldine Maynard to play the part of the principal nymph, and when she appeared in one of the most charming costumes in the world, her long black hair spangled with gold, such a murmur of applause and admiration arose amongst the cavaliers and nobles around her Majesty's throne, that she became angry and envious.

"'Fore Heaven, what have we here?" she said, turning her eyes in wrath upon Raleigh, who was most enthusiastic in his applause, "what is this stuff toward, and who are the mummers before us, Sir Francis?" And when the dialogue had reached a certain length, she took opportunity of breaking off in a huff

"Lov'st thou music?
Oh! 'tis sweet.
What is dancing?
E'en the mirth of feet."

“By our royal word and so it is,” interrupted the Queen rising. “Enough of this masque, my lords, it wearies us. Our hostess here will do well to give us an opportunity of disporting ourselves in the dance ere supper time. Sir Christopher Hatton, see to this gear an’ it so please ye.

“‘A hall, a hall, give place and foot it, boys.’”

Her Majesty rose, and Sir Christopher responded to the command with alacrity. It jumped with his humour, and indeed at this period dancing consisted for the most part in a series of jumps, cuts and capers, and he who jumped highest was considered the best performer.

Her Majesty was especially good at a couranto, she could caper like the wild Morisco, and more than once had given the French Ambassador a saltatory specimen of her agility, which had sufficiently astonished his weak mind, concluding as she sat down with,

“There, Monsieur, you can convey to your

Duke an assurance that as far as the lavolta, the couranto, or the sinkapace goes, I can at least match with your candidate."

To describe the dancing on the present occasion would be difficult; it more resembled what we should call a game of romps than anything else. Only to see the stately form of Sir Walter Raleigh, stiff, starched, and beruffled, and with his trunks puffed to an enormous size, one time stalking through a figure, and at another springing and leaping about like a puppet at a show; and then to see Sir Christopher Hatton execute his various and curiously invented cuts and capers too—"Higher, ha! higher, 'Twas excellent, 'i faith!" as Sir Toby would have worded it. Nay, it would have made our more modern ball-room votaries expire with laughter to have beheld the style then in vogue.

Sir Philip Sidney, that darling of chivalry as he was called, even he, following the fashion of his day, jumped and capered with the best there.

Somehow, however, notwithstanding all this fierce endeavour to be jovial, something lacked, and the sports flagged marvelously.

Her Majesty was evidently out of sorts and out of temper too, and her mood seemed to affect all around. That destroyer of all pleasure, the tooth-ache, troubled her much, soured her temper, and marred all her mirth. The only time she condescended to smile was when her fool, Clod, offered to relieve her pain by himself extracting the offending molar.

"Your poor fool, Clod," he said, "begs of your Royal Highness to submit your royal jaw to his care, and in the twinkling of a star he will have out the offender."

But that which most troubled and affected her spirits was some news she received during the evening that a new plot of a more perilous nature than usual, had just been discovered to be in existence.

One Deshapps, it was affirmed, had just arrived from France, suborned by some

popish conspirators with a horrible plan, to place a barrel of gunpowder under the chamber where she slept; and albeit the bold Tudor swore at first by Heaven's grace she would not allow these scarecrows and affrighting torments to mar her life, and hinder all her delight, yet certain it was that what with tooth-ache, and what with ill tidings, her Majesty was in a very ill frame of mind.

Burleigh, Walshingham, and Leicester, who were perpetually at work against the Scottish Queen, even at this moment of social enjoyment failed not to whisper in her ear that such conspiracies were certainly owing to that lady and her partizans, and to urge her no longer to delay the execution. Early and late, in all seasons and on all occasions, did this wily trio keep this important subject before the Queen, until they effected their purpose; nay, we fear they scrupled not to sacrifice the innocent in their endeavours.

"Your Majesty is to know," said Walshingham, as he held a short audience in a small apartment which adjoined the sleeping

room appropriated for her during her stay, and where were arranged no less than sixteen of her eighty wigs upon a shelf amongst the innumerable paints, boxes of pomade and cosmetiques,* and the vast quantity of dresses it was her usage to carry with her.

“Your Majesty ought to be fully aware that whilst this queen lives, your royal life is jeopardized. Everywhere treason lurks ; even in the very chamber where you lie. Nay, within the last hour, through secret and accredited intelligence, I find that here upon my own domain, a caitiff villain, a popish conspirator, whom the officers of justice had tracked and all but captured, lies concealed in the house of one who, before this news, I could have sworn was loyal as my own right hand.”

“Are you well advised in this matter, my lord ?” said the Queen ; “methinks the

* The quantity of dresses, the variety of cosmetiques, and the immense amount of luggage Elizabeth was wont to bring with her, or had forwarded to the places she honoured by a visit, was extraordinary.

cunning and cupidity of some of these spies and intelligencers, whom of late you have used in your zeal and care of our royal person, hath in some sort overreached itself. Innocent persons have in too many cases been mixed up with the guilty. Where and upon whom doth your intelligence now point in this new instance?"

"Upon a hitherto most worthy and well-beloved tenant of my own, one Maynard, a miller, who resides upon the Common hard by. He hath given harbourage, and become mixed up with a certain papist conspirator named Rookwood, a most dangerous villain, and at whose house your Majesty may remember to have stayed a whole fortnight some short time back."

"Is this Maynard a papist too?"

"Hardly so."

"And who then is your informant?"

"One Skinflint, also a tenant of my own; he was present, being an old friend of Master Maynard's; he was invited on Christmas Eve, and witnessed the whole transaction."

“And so hath betrayed his friend, eh?”

“In the service of your Majesty, and where your royal safety is concerned, old friendships and all else should be forgotten?”

“Perhaps so. Meantime we will ponder over and sleep upon the matter, and to-morrow we will confer further. Good night, Sir Francis. This torment I feel ever and anon, this face-ache doth more feelingly persuade me of the precarious nature of my state here on earth, than all the plots and conspiracies you have told me of. Can neither yourself nor your lady tell me of some relief, some cure for this cruel pain?”

“None, your Highness, but to have the tooth out.”

“Or bear it patiently. I can neither do the one nor the other. Good night, Sir Francis; by’r Lady I may almost say good morning; for look, the dawn is beginning to break there over the woods of Sheen.”

Sir Francis bowed and retired as her Majesty’s two women entered, in order to divest her royal person of the manifold appli-

ances, and the paint, patches, puffs, wig, ruffs, &c., &c., which had to be removed ere she could step into that somewhat extraordinary bath composed of wine, which it was her custom, always ere she retired, to repair her strength by indulging in.*

* Queen Elizabeth used a bath of wine, the Empress of Russia one of milk.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HER Majesty rose late the next day, the sun was high in the heavens as she made her difficult and elaborate toilet. The distressing malady in her tooth, or teeth, still rankled and tormented her; all which was felt and participated in, not only by her more immediate attendants, but by all whom duty and service brought near her; she rated one, railed at another, tore up the aglets of gold enamelled with blue, which were set upon a gown of purple velvet, and destroyed several tassels of gold; she also tore off and threw several buttons, knotted with pearls, at the head of her principle dresser, and kicked the hat she was to have worn on that day, and which was ornamented with a band of gold

with knots set in garnets, clean into the fire.

Queens are but mortals after all. Her Majesty had a most terrible spirit, she could sink, burn, and destroy, she could unfrock a bishop, behead a duke, burn a traitor, and many other Tudor like and regal acts could she do. But she could not bear the tooth-ache ; and what is more, high and mighty, as was her spirit, she could not make up her mind or screw her courage to the sticking place to have it out. 'Twas singular, but no less true ; she who could sign a warrant which severed life at a blow, she upon whose forehead sat

“A bare ribbed death,”

could not find courage to have out the offending agony that marred all her delight, and made her feel envious of the beggar at her gate, and no wonder,

“For there was never yet a philosopher
That could endure the tooth-ache patiently.”

So said Shakspeare, and so said Her Majesty. Nay, in her extremity, she resolved to ask the advice of a living philosopher, and accordingly announced to her immediate attendants, to Burleigh, and her other ministers, her intention of paying a visit to Dr. Dee of Mortlake.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT so stirring a period of so eventful a reign, it must not be imagined that even the visit of royalty at the mansion of a country gentleman could be entirely dedicated to silken dalliance, feasting, and revelry.

Perhaps the very words which Shakspeare wrote at that very time were suggested by that times abuse.

“Happy he whose cloak and cincture can
Hold out this tempest.
A thousand businesses are brief in hand,
And Heaven itself doth frown upon the land.”

Dalliance and diversion there certainly was, and not a little of it ; but dark intrigue, and state matters, all took their turn, and the headsman might be said to stalk about amidst the pleasures of the hour. Wherever

that dark Earl (as he was called) Leicester walked and talked, men might easily imagine as much ; his footstep crushed all that stood in his path ; yet, secret, sly, cruel, and revengeful as he was, still, perhaps, he was not the worst subject by many assembled at that period, and under that roof.

Glittering as they did in gorgeous array, beruffed and bewhiskered ; even their rapiers and daggers set with precious stones “ appalled as became the brave ;” even thus, handsome and noble looking as most of these high-born men were, there lurked in the heart of two or three the meanest passions, the most subtle and sordid feelings it was possible for human hearts to conceive.

To counterbalance this black-hearted set, this company of vile, self-seeking sycophants, there were also mixed up in the throng men whose dispositions, and high and chivalrous feelings would have done honour to any court in any age—Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Walter Raleigh, my Lord Southampton, the Earl of Sussex, &c., were the foils to their more

worldly companions. It was towards noon on this day that a goodly company, whilst they held converse upon the state affairs, which had occupied some hours in the morning, accompanied by some of the ladies of the bed-chamber, some lady visitors and other rare and exquisite females were perambulating the ample garden of the mansion.

Amongst the promenaders on this occasion, and at this moment, we wish to bring under the especial notice of the reader, Sir Philip Sidney, my Lord Rich, Francis Walshingham, and Penelope Devereux

They walked together in a more secluded part of the garden, pacing leisurely, and lover-like, but by no means so loving withal as they seemed. They were indeed playing the game of cross purposes to their own detriment and discomfort; having sought the walk from different points, and met face to face, with all seeming pleasure and jollity, they coupled the conflicting feelings of strong love, bitter hate, and jealousy, "cruel as the grave." Sir Philip loved the Lady Penelope Devereux with an all absorbing

passion ; she was beautiful, gentle, and affectionate, perhaps the loveliest female of that galaxy of females. Her only faults were, excessive pride, a most jealous disposition, and a trifling amount of shrewdness, which made her at times utter sharp and bitter words which she hardly meant, and would fain have recalled the moment they were uttered. She admired and valued the chivalrous suitor who had some time before solicited and been promised her hand. But their bickerings had of late resulted in so severe a quarrel that they had become distraught and formal in manner to each other. A word, a look almost, might have set matters right, but where two such high-born, proud and wilful beings were concerned, such word and look was not offered by either party.

My Lord Rich on this morning walked apart with Penelope ; he had long been her professed admirer, her most devoted slave, albeit, a rejected suitor of some years back. He was not, however, the man to be dasked by either rebuke or rejection, and

even when he found on her return to England that the lady had accepted the suit of Sir Philip Sidney, he missed no opportunity of renewing his own suit. The man was so utterly contemptible in the eyes of Sir Philip, so unworthy of his sword, that hitherto the knight had avoided anything like an encounter, or even a word of reproach. On the present occasion, he sought to retaliate upon his lady love by carrying on a desperate flirtation with Frances Walshingham, who now seized the opportunity to try by every female art to win him.

They walked up and down a broad walk at the very end of the plaisance, secluded and sombre from the thickly planted trees on either hand. In summer it must have been a lovely spot; even as a winter scene, with the frost so severe and the white snow all around, it had its charms.

Charms, but not to those who promenaded there, for the passions of hate, love, despair and agony, we say, possessed the quartette.

Sir Philip's was a disposition that could

ill brook deceit, double dealing, and treachery where he had given his all. Even his affections towards his nearest and dearest kindred were all merged in his love for the beautiful black-browed Devereux. Alas ! how deceitful is hope in such a case. Somehow, even whilst he walked and feigned the utmost attention to her who was by his side, a flash would come across him that after all Lady Devereux loved him still ; that she could not have entirely forgotten everything. Suddenly he stopped ; a small scrap of paper lay before him. It had evidently been written for the purpose of causing the very meeting he now beheld, and was so accidentally made a witness of. There was not much in it, but it showed the deceit that was being practised upon that generous suffering heart. Alas ! what will not woman do even against those they have loved, when another supersedes that one.

Lord Rich, inferior as he was in comparison to her former lover, had somehow entangled her fancy for the time, and then

there was the pleasure of a secret understanding, a pleasure which many girls appreciate till marriage with an unworthy object reveals to them what their fools' paradise was.

Poor Sir Philip, the few lines he saw sufficiently served to add to his misery and confirm his fears; for as there was neither address or name, he felt no compunction in perusing them. They were few, but to the purpose.

“Dear my Lord,

“I have received your letter, and will give you the meeting. My swain will either be engaged on business or out of the way. At eleven o'clock I will therefore be at the old trysting place.”

Sir Philip read this scrap; he thought he knew the handwriting, and he felt the dagger in his heart's core. He rejoined Frances Walshingham, resumed his dalliance with her, and as a man plunges into a river to end his misery, he at once offered her his hand.

"One moment, lady," he said, after he had done so, "one moment and I will rejoin you."

As he spoke he turned and met the Lady Devereux and Lord Rich face to face; he held out the paper he had read, and then tossed it towards her.

"Take it, Madam," he said, "'tis your own composition." He looked steadily at her for a moment; it was a look she could hardly endure.

"For you, sirrah," he added, "the participator in this woman's meanness and duplicity in her heartless conduct towards one, at least worthy of truth and honour, if not of affection and love. For you, the double dealer whom the devil aids, I have nothing but contempt."

Sir Philip drew off his embroidered gauntlet as he spoke, and dashed it with such force into the face of the drawling sycophant that the shock made him reel. He then turned and swiftly rejoined Frances Walshingham.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Lord Rich was not exactly a coward, neither was he a hero. He had a very good idea of the "discretion" that is the better part of valour. His morning, or mid-day, courage lacked a cup of canary, or rather a good many of them; consequently his sword was oftener out after supper than before. He was indeed like those men who as Mercutio says, "When they enter the confines of a tavern, clap their swords upon the table, and say, 'Heaven send me no need of thee,' but by the operation of the second cup, draw it on the drawer when indeed there was no need."

"Sir Philip Sidney must answer this insult, lady," he said to Lady Devereux, "not so much on account of the insult to myself,

as for the gross affront he has put upon you. Nay, had it not been that I dared not draw in private quarrel so near the presence, I had stabbed him here where he stood."

My Lord Rich uttered this much by way of excuse to the lady by his side, but in reality he felt his own inferiority so greatly, and dreaded the chivalrous man who he had injured, that he trembled as he muttered the threat.

In the excitement and alarm consequent upon the address of Sir Philip, Penelope Devereux had neglected to pick up the scrap of paper which he had thrown to her; consequently when they passed on it lay where it had fallen.

It was indeed somewhat unlucky that the lady had not received it, as perhaps if she had done so, its perusal would have shown her more plainly the unscrupulous and vile nature of her present suitor. The letter was indeed a forgery of my Lord Rich's, who in addition to his other accomplishments was

well skilled in the art of imitating the handwriting of others.

Scarcely had they passed on, when a large party was seen at the extremity of the dark walk, and as Lord Rich and his companion turned at the sound of many voices, they beheld the Queen accompanied by several of her ladies and nobles approaching.

Her Majesty was in her riding gear, and the angry spot glowed upon her brow.

Plots and complots, dire, tooth-ache and heart-ache, and half a dozen other ills to which royalty is subject, rendered her anything at that moment but "fancy free." The maiden Queen must indeed have possessed a most capacious heart; Leicester, Raleigh, Blount, and others all had their turn. At the present moment Sir Philip Sidney was the idol of the royal lady's affections.

She walked as was her wont when under the influence of anger, apart, in advance of her attendants like a chafed lioness, dangerous to encounter. Suddenly she stopped, a

scrap of paper was lying at the foot of a tree just before her.

"Lift up that paper," she said, turning and addressing Lord Rich, who had drawn up a few paces, and stood bare-headed to allow her to pass. Lord Rich looked in the direction she pointed, and recognized his own handy-work. He advanced, looked at the fragment, and hesitated for a moment; he would gladly have eaten it if he could.

"What is it my lord?" inquired the Queen, as he held it gingerly betwixt his finger and thumb.

"Eh, ah!" said Lord Rich, "positively it seems some trifling production utterly unworthy of your Majesty's notice."

"Give it to me, Sir," said her Majesty sternly. "I will myself at more leisure judge of its import."

So saying, her Majesty put the letter in a small bag or pouch which hung at her side.

"We are well served and attended here," she continued, glancing at Penelope Devereux;

of whom, since she had fallen in love with Sidney, she had become jealous.

"Yes, well served. I walk here in order to seek my cup-bearer. I was informed he had consorted with you, Lady Devereux. Nay, by the Lord, I say again we are well served here. Where, I say, is Sir Philip Sidney?"

"Sir Philip Sidney was here," said Lady Devereux, "but has passed onwards the way your Majesty was going."

The Queen gave the lady a searching look, but took no farther notice, and then went on in quest of her cup-bearer. As, however, she failed to find him, she returned to the house, ordered her palfrey, and set forth in order to pay a visit to the celebrated alchymist and philosopher, the great Doctor Dee.

Meantime, Sir Philip in marvellous distemperature, after parting with Fanny Walsingham, betook himself to his own private apartment, and by letter unburdened his woes to a particular friend and brother soldier,

then serving in Ireland. After thus giving vent to the "grief which refused to speak," Sir Philip threw himself upon the bed, and wept like an infant; that true and chivalrous heart was indeed torn with anguish and the pangs of despised love.

A gentle tap at his door announced a visitor; another moment a brother poet and one he knew how to appreciate and value, entered the room, and as he rose and held out his hand, it was grasped by William Shakspeare.

"Ah, my friend," he said, "you come to visit a sad and heart-broken man; welcome, for of all men you are the only one I could endure the companionship of at this moment."

"I can in some sort imagine your cause of grief," said Shakspeare; "she who you so dearly love has played you false."

"Even so."

"Cast her from your thoughts. Believe me she is not worthy of one so noble, generous and true."

"Alas! I have tried hard to do so," returned Sidney. "But I find it impossible; I must still love her dearer than even life itself."

"Can you still love one whose deceit and treachery has caused you to suffer agony greater almost than mortal can bear? I have long seen your devotion and truth, and the cruel deceit of her who possesses your heart. She loves another; forget her, fly from her."

"Perhaps I might do so if she had given her love worthily, but to yonder sneaking low-born companion. To cast herself away upon one, who, believe me, will never properly appreciate such a treasure. 'Tis that which tortures, which kills me."

"Forget her; let the thought that she is utterly unworthy, steel your heart. Again I tell you that she has long made you a dupe, a laughing-stock, in order to deceive and when she most pretended that you, and you alone, had her affections, she most deceived you "

Sidney buried his face in his hands, and again wept.

"Alas! my friend, you know her not; she is worthy of an emperor's love."

"As far as beauty goes, the black browed traitress is all radiant, I confess," returned Shakspeare; "but a woman who could deceive and destroy one so true, must have a heart so hard, selfish, and unworthy, that for mine own part I would tear her image from my thoughts, if my heart broke at the same time."

Sir Philip walked up and down the apartment for some time.

"Do you really think she loves this caitiff slave?"

"I do. I have observed their intimacy for some time past. She thinks not of you, she cares not for you, she loves that man Lord Rich."

"Then I will not kill him. Her affections must be respected at whatever cost. Let her own remorse hereafter be her punishment."

"If such a woman has remorse. But no,

let her future husband be her punishment ; and, believe me, she will have enough to bear with in that quarter.

"Alas," returned Sidney, "I would save her if I never saw her more."

"Mark me," said Shakspeare, "she deceived you, and she will deceive him. You cannot alter her. Let her e'en go her own way, and do as I say, forget you ever saw one so unworthy of a soldier's heart. Come, let me persuade you to throw off this unprevailing sorrow. In action seek for the antidote to your grief."

"So let it be, my good friend," returned Sidney ; "yes, thou hast prevailed. I will do all for her sake, but never again shall she hurt this poor heart."

As Sidney spoke he rose, and together with his friend left the apartment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HER Majesty the Queen with her assembled attendants mounted her palfrey, and set forth to visit Dr. Dee:

It was but a step only to Mortlake, and the cavalcade almost stretched across the Common as they rode, a large party being in attendance.

It was a goodly sight to see, for even when the Queen took but her ordinary equestrian excursions the cavalcade formed a show, of which in modern times we have little conception.

She entered the town of Mortlake, and rode straight to the Doctor's house, where she alighted and enquired for the great man.

The Doctor was at home she was in-

formed, (and well he might be, for on that morning he had buried his wife, and had only just returned from the funeral).

Her Majesty was told as much, and that the philosopher was now shut up in his laboratory, and in great grief.

What matters! The court of a Queen, and that Queen a Tudor, takes but small account of private grief.

Her Majesty entered the house, and signified that she would fain have the great philosopher and physician summoned immediately.

"I am myself troubled with a most distressing grief," she intimated to the servitor who attended.

The man bowed; he stood in great awe of his master, who he felt sure could raise the infernal devil if he chose. But still, the awe, the divinity that hedges a queen was not to be withstood, and, albeit, he had but just received from the philosopher strict orders that he was not to be disturbed on any

account, he forthwith announced the arrival of the Royal Tudor with all true duty.

The Doctor indeed scarcely required such an announcement, for he had seen from his chamber window the whole street filled with a mounted train of cavaliers in waiting

“A sea of waving plumes.”

Being impressed with the importance of such a visit, it was some little time ere he made his appearance, and it might have amused a modern courtier to have seen the curiosity, the ardent desire her Majesty seemed to feel in all and everything contained within the chamber into which she had been shewn. Not a cupboard, not a closet, not a nick-nack, or a relic, did she fail to peep and pry into, examine, handle, and observe curiously.

The chamber, like all else in that dark and mysterious mansion, had a most sombre appearance. Like the shop of the Mantuan alchemist, albeit, it was evidently a sort of

reception room, it was crammed and crowded with articles appertaining to the physician and the alchymist's art, even to the remnants of pack thread and old cakes of roses. Then there were bottles, cases and boxes, containing philtres, drugs and medicines, stuffed owls, lizards, bats, bones of all sorts of animals, skulls of human beings too, and even more than one entire skeleton pendant at different parts of the room.

At one end of the apartment also was to be seen a dark and mystic curtain, which seemed to cut off at least a quarter of the room; this seemed to be in some way fixed and fastened so that no one could in any way penetrate its secrets.

The Queen and her ladies, and the few cavaliers who had been permitted to enter the room, would fain have pryed behind this curtain if they could; for we fear that delicacy and good manners were not so prevalent then as in our times, when a royal lady would as soon eat her fingers as offer to

offend by touching aught in the house she was visiting during the absence of the host.

Now, however, both Sir Christopher Hatton and Sir Francis Walshingham were busily engaged in trying to get Her Majesty a slight peep behind this curtain'd mystery, when all at once, as if he had risen from the very floor, the alchymist stood in the centre of the gloomy chamber.

The Queen uttered a little exclamation, and turned. Walshingham started, and Sir Christopher made a sort of *demi volte*, and faced about also as the deep bass of the Doctor's voice suddenly sounding, inquired how, and in what way he could serve Her Majesty.

The proud Tudor was, in short, a little put out when she confronted the tall form of the alchymist, who stood so steadily regarding her; nay, she could scarcely brook so unceremonious a stare as he fixed upon her aquiline visage.

"How, Doctor," she said, "have you no knee for your sovereign?"

"No, Madam ; but I have a vow in its place."

"A vow?"

"Never to bow the knee to aught that walks the earth."

"And know you not that I could make that proud knee bend, and that head bow low at my pleasure?"

"But that would not be willing homage, Madam," returned the Doctor. "Your Majesty might enforce a ceremony, inasmuch as you have power. But I, your physician, might object. Nay, what saith my valued acquaintance and esteemed friend, Will Shakspeare, in one of his delectable plays.

" 'The abuse of greatness is
When it disjoins remorse from power.' "

"Enough, good Sir, enough. We love the sayings of that worthy poet and playwright, and are always edified by them. I will confess that human frailty even in a Queen makes me to-day a suitor for your art."

"My art, my life itself, is at your Majesty's service," returned the stately Doctor. "My knee only is bent to my Maker. May I inquire your Majesty's ailment?"

"A most grievous toothache, which nothing can mitigate or alleviate day or night."

"I would your Majesty had told me of some malady even more dangerous, which I might have hoped to cure. For the toothache there is but one remedy—to have it out."

The Queen recoiled, as the great man, after unlocking a sort of casket which was on a side table, produced a most formidable looking instrument with bolster and claw.

"I can't consent to the operation," said the Queen sinking down on a chair. "Put up that instrument of torture at once; hide it from my sight."

"Allow me, Madam," said the Doctor, after stowing away the instrument, "to inspect your mouth."

The Queen seemed hardly to relish even that.

"Harkee, Sir," she said ; " mind you use no deceit in this matter. We have heard of such practices as taking advantage of a patient, and drawing out a tooth."

"My head shall answer for my truth, Madam," said the Doctor, as he proceeded to examine one of Her Majesty's back teeth. "The tooth is decayed and useless, and should be drawn," he said. "It is incurable, and will ever be a grievous torment to your Majesty."

"You are a magician as well as a physician," said the Queen. "Is it not possible that some malign and magical influence may have been employed against my peace and rest?"

"None whatever."

"And you can then cure this torment only by extraction. Singular," said the Queen rising ; "here is a man who, in his written communications to me, promises ere he dies to divine the elixir of eternal life, the

stone of the philosopher, yet he cannot cure one of the simplest maladies we poor creatures are heir to. How say you, Doctor?"

"As I said in my letters to your Majesty when asking for royal patronage, that, if assisted, I will without fail bring my life long efforts at length to perfection. I have already all but found the art of transmuting metals, and will, ere long, be able to concoct the elixir of life."

"Can you fix quicksilver?" inquired the Queen.

"No."

"Nor cure the tooth-ache?"

"Yes, as you can any other traitor."

"How?"

"By hanging."

"Hanging?"

"Yes. Hang first and draw afterwards. The same as your Majesty uses towards all other traitors against your life and peace. I have a *sort* of remedy given me by one Anthony Fienatius, but I confess I should not like to apply it."

"Why?"

"Because it is treason to entrust the sacred person of a Sovereign to the discretion of a foreign practioner, who is, I firmly believe, both a Jew and a papist."

"Do you not know the nature of the ingredients?"

"Not advisedly; although by analysis I have discovered that the Chelidonium Moss, or Fœnugreek is the chief."

"How is it to be used?"

"To be put into your Majesty's hollow tooth, which must then be stopped with wax."

"And you cannot recommend it?"

"I can recommend nothing but drawing, as the best and most esteemed way."

The Queen deliberated awhile.

"Show me your instrument again," she at length said.

The Doctor produced it.

The courage of the lion-hearted Elizabeth again failed her, and again she expressed so much repugnance to the operation, that the

united eloquence of all around could not prevail upon her to undergo it. Nay, so great was the disgust and affright the sight of the Doctor's extractor again excited, that she declared her pains had departed, and rose to take leave.

There was something, however, about the great alchymist that much pleased and interested her Majesty.

"I like not your remedy for my pains, good Doctor;" she observed "but I must say I like your plain dealing."

The Doctor was pleased at so great a compliment from so great a lady.

"Perhaps," he said, addressing himself to Lord Leicester, who was present, "you could persuade on her Majesty to prolong her visit, so as to enter my study, and take a glance into my magic mirror?"

The Queen signified her readiness to do so.

"By Heaven's grace," she said, "we had altogether forgotten that wondrous mirror, albeit report of its magic powers have long since reached us."

As she said this, the Queen gave the Doctor her gloved and jewelled hand to kiss.

The Doctor saluted the hand, and with all true duty and devotion he then desired all but her Majesty to stand back, and putting a sort of speaking trumpet to his mouth, in loud sepulchral tones summoned an assistant, who always attended him in his conjuring and magical exhibitions.

"DA MO LEON GROTHANTHUS," he called.

An answering voice equally gruff immediately replied from behind the curtain,

"WHAT WANTEST THOU WITH ME?"

"OF MY MAGIC CHAMBER I WANT THE GOLDEN KEY," returned the magician.

No sooner said than done. A large gilded key came up through a trap close to the spot on which the Doctor stood.

He immediately applied it to a key-hole in the panneling beside the curtain before named, which instantly sprung up with a crashing sound, and revealed a large room, or recess, dimly lighted at the farther extremity.

A belief in witchcraft, a belief in magic and the power of wizards, at this period pervaded all classes, high and low. Her Majesty was, notwithstanding her masculine mind and great talents, wonderfully impressed with this sort of creed ; consequently not only herself, but all with her, felt a degree of awe and terror when they found themselves in a room and a presence, which they began to consider was the familiar haunt of one having dealings with the enemy of mankind.

Poisonings, murders, and all sorts of evil deeds were constantly brought against those who practised this horrible imposture, yet those who were supposed to possess supreme power over the lesser practioners, were held almost as sacred from the arm of power. . If some poor old crazy creature took it into her head to fancy she could sail upon a stormy sea across the Channel in a sieve, she was liable at any moment to be burnt to death. If some unhappy maniac or demented simpleton raved that he was the saviour of the world, the unhappy Tom o' Bedlam was likely

enough to be flogged from Charing Cross to Temple Bar. But if a magnifico of this class, a deep designing knave, by trickery and deceit could manage to promise those in power an anticipated discovery of the elixir of life, or prospect of unbounded wealth by the power of transmuting metals into gold, he felt secure from all danger, and found himself sought after, courted and fêted by crowned heads.

Nay, it was but a few years later that Shakspeare himself took his idea of the weird sisters and their incantations and prophetic warnings from one of the state trials, which he must have either heard of, or been present at.*

* Some of the victims at these trials boasted of ruining and wrecking ships, others of sailing in sieves across the ocean. Nay, Bessie Tod, a crazy old beldame at Leith, baptized a huge cat, tied the fore joints of a murdered man's finger to its tail, and threw it into the sea at midnight, amidst a large assemblage of wild and crazy hags as demented as herself.

Again, Annie Sympson and her cronies confessed

That Doctor Dee was a charlatan and a cheat of the first quality, there can be little doubt ; nay, perhaps he was half insane upon some subjects connected with the abstruse studies it was his delight to pursue. But that he was a wonderfully clever man, and had penetrated into many matters which to have proclaimed and prophesied would have caused him to be considered a fool instead of a magician was equally certain.

For instance, the marvellous power of steam, and all it would be likely in after times to effect. To see the revolution of the times, make mountains level. Nay, some of his forebodings, conjectures, and prognostications he resolved to submit and show to her Majesty on the present occasion. Accordingly when he invited the Queen into his

before the Council at Edinburgh, that herself and a large sisterhood, two hundred in number, put to sea in sieves, each carrying a flaggon of wine, and floated before morning to North Berwick ; Gillies Duncan, a famous sorcerer, heading the procession, and playing all sorts of hellish tunes upon a bagpipe.

mystic region, he announced that he intended to show her some touches of her kingdom after some three hundred years had passed away.

"Your Majesty will be pleased," he said, "to fix your eyes on yonder part of the room, and to be seated in this chair. My Lord of Leicester, and Sir Christopher Hatton may remain in attendance, the rest must stand aloof, as I cannot permit more to be present."

As the Magician spoke, a strange invisible perfume seemed to "hit the senses" of the royal party; the curtain slowly descended, and the chamber became involved in darkness. Suddenly, a soft and strange melody gradually came from a distant part of the mansion, a light was seen on the opposite side of the room, and a variety of scenes passed in review before their eyes.

First was seen a vast and stormy ocean, which as the wind and waves roared and rustled, bore upon its surface an immense fleet of vessels which passed across. Then

came a representation of the destruction of those vessels, when all seemed crashing ruin and horror.

"So perish your Majesty's great fear, and so perish every enemy of your house."

"Is that the threatened danger from Spain?" inquired the Queen.

"Such, and so be it," returned Doctor Dee. "Your Majesty's power, and the wrath of Heaven will dispose of that event. Now behold the same scene, and the same sea, in which this scene will be enacted some three hundred years hence."

As he spoke, there passed over the water a huge fleet of strange and uncouth looking vessels, which without sails were propelled at prodigious rate against both wind and tide. These monsters of the deep with a quick pulsating sound vomited large volumes of smoke from their decks, and cast the water up in foam upon either side as they dashed onwards.

The Queen was astonished, the Earl of

Leicester puzzled, Sir Christopher Hatton aghast.

“Behold the change which a few years will produce in shipping and maritime affairs.”

“But how will this be effected?” inquired the Queen. “Methinks that the great puffs of smoke which emanate from the chimneys of those vessels, speak of gunpowder; though how the wheels which seemed to tear the very ocean as they revolved, could be made to propel them through the water at so fierce a rate, I am puzzled to imagine.”

“Steam, your Majesty. Steam henceforth is to be the great power, the great revolutionizer of the world.”

“Steam!” exclaimed Sir Christopher. “What, thou dost not mean the steam from hot water?”

“The same.”

Sir Christopher laughed, a sort of incredulous laugh, and the Queen and Leicester looked at each other, as if to say is this man most knave, fool, or madman. Doctor Dee

observed the look. He smiled to himself, and went on,

"Now see," he said, "what that same power will do on land."

As he spoke, the former scene seemed to dissolve, to pass away, and a landscape, strange to the eyes of the beholders, having fertile fields and buildings quite different from anything they had ever conceived or contemplated appeared.

"The scene before you," said Dee, "is the same spot your Majesty might view even now from the top window of this house. 'Tis Sheen Forest, cleared, cultivated, and built upon. In the distance you will behold passing along, tearing across the empty surface at an almost incredible speed, like some fiery serpent, vomiting forth jets of flame and vapour, another most strange invention, by which goods, horses, people, whole armies will be sent from one end of the earth's surface to the other."

"Steam again, I suppose," said Hatton, as her Majesty and Leicester, in speechless

astonishment beheld what in modern days would be immediately recognized as a railway train in full sweep from London to Richmond.

"Truly the whole world must undergo strange transformations ere such things can be," said the Queen.

"It will do so," replied Doctor Dee. "Nay, an' it so please ye, I can show your Majesty's metropolis at the same period, and also as it will appear, say, one hundred years hence."

As he spoke there appeared an enormous mass of bricks and mortar, a city composed of buildings so ugly in comparison to the picturesque edifices of their own period; so vast, so extensive, so blackened with the smoke of coal fires; so utterly metamorphosed, and incomprehensible to their imaginations, that they were quite bewildered. Close upon St. James' Palace, and on the small rise whereon stood then a forest with the deer grazing in its glades, appeared now streets of tall edifices, crowded with all sorts of vehicles,

so strange, so utterly beyond anything they had ever beheld, or contemplated, or imagined, that again they were bewildered, incredulous, and aghast.

"The intermediate events," continued Dee, "the progressive march of things, the purifying ordeal by which this Babylonian labyrinth has grown to what you see, I will also exhibit. Behold an intermediate state of things."

Her Majesty looked and beheld London when but one hundred years were supposed to have passed. Empty, doomed, stricken, "as if some planetary plague was hanging over it," and pestilence ruled unchecked, the city of the plague was before her. It looked as if decaying under some dire leprosy. The sun itself looked sick, dim, and aged; the very end of all things seemed at hand. Houses, antiquated dwellings, all were empty, deserted. Save where death reigned in the chambers, all was still there, and only the great river rolled onwards in its usual course.

"Yet once again; yet one more change,"

said Dr. Dee, "and I will no longer detain your Majesty. Behold the cure of all this. Ere phoenix-like, the greater city we have beheld came into life and existence."

As he spoke, a huge fire suddenly arose. It began at one end, and gradually extending, consumed the whole of the metropolis. As the fire sank, the exhibition finished. The mystic room was again enshrouded in darkness, and the curtain arose with a crash. The Doctor bowed, and the exhibition was at an end.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE Queen was greatly impressed with this visit to Doctor Dee. With her usual shrewdness she saw where he really was imbued with wisdom, and where he was merely practising upon her credulity. She gave him credit for his good gifts, and resolved to make use of him so as to serve her own ends. As a clever poet wrote in later times, she told him how much and how little she trusted him.

“ I without a telescope,
Can spy your faults out, and descry
Where you tell truth, and where you lie.”

The Doctor bowed his acquiescence. He gave her Majesty full credit for her wonderful sense, and fairly acknowledged that any attempt to deceive her would be fruitless.

“How you have become acquainted with a foreknowledge of that which you have exhibited, I can readily imagine,” she added. “Your wisdom sees that our present system is likely to produce the horrors you have so well shown in regard to your city of the plague, and also you have as easily surmised that our crowded and timber-built city must one day be consumed by fire.”

Again Doctor Dee bowed, and her Majesty went on,

“Your studies and discoveries may also have led you to believe in the all powerful agent you have shown us; still you must allow me to credit as much and as little of that matter as I choose.”

Doctor Dee bowed, and again her Majesty gave him her jewelled glove to kiss.

“You are a philosopher, and altogether a wonderful wizard,” she said, as he attended her to the street, and stood there whilst her Master of the Horse assisted her to mount.

“Nevertheless,” she continued when fairly in the saddle, “there is one thing I feel

persuaded you cannot do ; you cannot cure the tooth-ache ; nay, even now I begin to feel its pangs coming on."

"An' it please your Majesty, I can draw it," said Dee significantly.

"Lud a mercy !" said the Queen. "An' so thou canst. Well, at some future time we may perhaps employ you to do so."

As her Majesty spoke she moved onwards ; hats and plumes were doffed as she passed through the attendant cavalcade, which then turned and followed at a brisk pace on their return to Barnes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN Sir Philip Sidney parted with his friend, he walked slowly up the avenue. Shakspeare turned to regard him as he did so. He saw that noble mind "was quite o'er-thrown." Sir Philip was a changed man from that hour.

Forget, "quotha"—forget! Who can do so? Who ever did forget? No, whilst memory held a seat in that chivalric brain, the horrid thought that another was to succeed to those smiles he had aspired to, must come like the breath of a blasting furnace and poison his delight, and mar every hour of his henceforth wretched life.

Sir Philip Sidney walked from that spot a changed and a miserable man. That high and chivalrous spirit was gone for ever, as

far as fate and woman's treachery could destroy it.

O, woman! what can you not do and undo. What joy, what misery, what an elysium, or what a hell, canst thou not make and unmake.

Shakspeare stopped and watched his friend as his step became slower, and his head bent lower to the very earth.

"The courtiers scholar's eye, tongue, sword," was no longer himself. The frame, the fine person, the noble look, the bearing, the majesty of the man might remain to all outward seeming, but it would be the shadow only of the former hero.

His better parts were all thrown down, and till the fatal day of Zutphen, where he fell and "wished to fall," that man must e'en walk the earth—alone.

For many hours did Sir Philip continue to pace that old avenue, and the shades of night found him still there, so long and so deeply had the barb entered into his heart.

Nay, he thought as he at length sought

his chamber, that he had almost succeeded in tearing out the passion that consumed him. And then again hope dawned, and again he thought that perhaps some touches, some "compunctious visitings" might yet remain in the heart of his beloved, and that still she might be moved in his favour.

"He took from the bosom of his doublet a small packet of the letters she had written to him some time back, and read them over once more ; then he sat down and indited a farewell letter to her.

CHAPTER XXX.

MEANTIME the absence of him, whom the Queen was wont to call the choicest jewel of her court, sadly perplexed and annoyed her Majesty. Her jealousy of the lovely Devereux was so great that she could not bear the sight of that lovely creature, albeit such was her fear that Penelope should find opportunity for a lengthened interview with her sometime lover, that she seldom allowed her to escape far from her eagle eye.

On her return from Doctor Dee's she had made inquiry for the lady, and ordered her to be summoned to her presence, ere she changed her riding gear, and received her with a sound rating for presuming to absent herself from attendance on that morning.

"You have, I suppose, been consorting with that inconsiderate fellow, Sidney," she said in great ire.

"May it please your Majesty," said Devereux tossing her pretty head scornfully, "I have not cast an eye on that gentleman since your Majesty went hence this morning."

"That doth better please me," said the Queen. "Nay, I must beg his pardon for so calling him as I just now did. Still, perhaps you can tell of his whereabouts, for I protest he hath been somewhat lax in his true duty since I came on this visit. Who here amongst ye all," she continued, turning to her ladies, "hath seen my truant cup-bearer?"

"Sir Philip was last seen in the pleasaunce, an' it so please your Majesty," said one of the ladies, "at the time your Highness took the air there after the morning meal."

"Ah, by my fay! that doth remind me," said the Queen, feeling in a small pocket or reticule which hung at her girdle; and taking out the small scrap of paper she had found

under the tree, she proceeded to peruse it.

In a moment her shrewd and clear brain detected that which the more jealous lover had failed to do ; she surmised at once that it was a forgery, and as she had seen some passages in the flirtation which had been going on between the presumed forger and her rival in Sidney's affections, her masculine mind at once determined her to act upon this document, and to rid herself for ever of that rival's influence.

"Stand forth, my Lord Rich," she said, turning and regarding that nobleman, who was at some distance amid the throng ; "stand forth ; and you, my Lords of Leicester and Burleigh," she added, "retire for a brief space, we would fain have a few minutes' private talk with this lord."

As she spoke, she advanced to the large window at the end of the apartment, and Lord Rich followed.

"This document, my lord," she said, "seems addressed to you by a maiden here present,

the daughter of one highly esteemed by the world, called the good Earl of Essex."

Lord Rich looked at the paper, turned very red, and then bowed, but uttered no word in reply.

"Think ye, my lord, that such a document or letter of invitation is a fitting and maidenly letter? Fitting, I say, for an earl's daughter to have written?"

Lord Rich looked foolish, puzzled; he knew not how to answer, he muttered something about love which must excuse all things.

"She never did write it," said the Queen.
"Fie on it, my lord, if you affect the maiden, and seek her in marriage, proclaim as much to her friends; you have our royal sanction, and we will in all things aid and forward the same."

My Lord Rich bent his knee, and poured forth a thousand thanks.

"I should have before sought your Majesty's influence with the parents of Lady Devereux, but in sooth I feared that your

Majesty intended to bestow the lady upon Sir Philip Sidney."

"And that," said the Queen, "is what I could under no circumstances agree to or allow. No, my lord, you will best serve and please us by pressing your suit vigorously with the Lady Devereux; and, as we before said, in all things depend upon our support and assistance."

My Lord Rich was in an ecstasy of delight; in place of the opposition he had anticipated, here was the royal sanction to his suit. He kissed the hand of the Queen, rose and retired as her Majesty now left the apartment in order to doff her riding-gear and prepare for the banquet which was spread in the great hall.

* * *

On this day after the banquet, her Majesty, after her own peculiar fashion, took it into her head to circumvent my Lord Burleigh, who had sent her on that same morning the names of seven gentlemen whom he considered worthy of having "Chivalry's Im-

print" conferred upon them, as he was pleased to word it. In other words, he wished her Majesty to knight them.

My Lord Burleigh, out of some fit of spleen or other, gave orders that the candidates for the honour should be so placed in the hall when her Majesty entered it after the banquet, that one half of these gentlemen who were of ancient lineage, would stand at the lower end, by which means those who were but parvenus being knighted first, as elder knights they would take precedence of their better born neighbours.

Clod, her fool, however, who "in the great heap of his wisdom" had found out this manœuvre, secretly informed the Queen thereof, who although she said nothing, perhaps thought the more, and accordingly when she passed up the Hall she took not the slightest notice of the candidates.

"By my coxcomb," said Clod, "your Majesty hath taken so much of the drug mandragora for that same tooth-ache which troubles you, that you have become oblivious.

Methinks your Majesty hath nearly forgotten these loyal gentlemen who are standing there, looking as foolish as your humble servant, and inviting knighthood at your royal hand."

The Queen laughed at her fool, and turned about.

"You are right, good Clod," she said, "I had almost forgotten the matter altogether. Nevertheless in this instance 'the first shall be last, and the last first.'"

She then proceeded to knight the gentlemen who stood lowest in the hall, and so proceeded with the whole seven.

My Lord Burleigh was terribly annoyed, especially when the all-licensed fool taunted him unmercifully at the turn affairs had taken.

"By my coxcomb," said Clod, "but that was well said and done too: 'the first shall be last,' eh? so saith the Holy Volume. Her Majesty was too fine for your wisdom, my lord."

"Go to, ass," returned Lord Burleigh, "a

few accolades to your back would be beneficial : 'A rod for the fool's back' is Scripture too. By the Lord, I care not if I be the inflictor."

Burleigh lifted his cane, but Clod turned upon his heel and escaped.

* * * *

Her Majesty was to stay a week at Walshingham's house, an infliction it is impossible to conceive in these later times. Sir Francis was put to his wits' end almost to keep the games alive. Dances, plays, masques, all sorts of devices "to ease the anguish of the torturing hour," were put in requisition. But still, what with the winter season, and her Majesty's torment, for she still continued to suffer with the tooth-ache, the sports and diversions at times seemed to flag and fail most awfully.

The day following the one on which she had visited Doctor Dee, amongst other matters which in somewhat puzzled her clear spirit, there came a rumour of a fresh plot against her royal life ; and one of the conspira-

tors, a desperate villain, who had hired himself out to some greater villains than himself, was apprehended close by her very chamber ; and the conspirator being put to the torture, had confessed that his intention was to have been concealed in the royal chamber, and to have stabbed the Queen at advantage while she slept.

Her Majesty was sufficiently annoyed and irritated.

"By the way, Sir Francis," she said, "what hath been done regarding that other affair you told us of a day or two back?"

"Your Majesty refers to the man Rookwood, who escaped from Oxford jail, and was concealed somewhere close at hand on the Common here?"

"I do."

"He hath escaped beyond seas."

"How came that to happen?"

"I suspect it was done by aidance of his entertainer, my tenant, the Miller of Barnes."

"And what hath been done to him?"

"Nothing at present. I was about to ask

your Majesty's pleasure. He lies now in his own cottage, together with his family, under strict surveillance. Nay, I was about to order him to be conveyed to the Tower and confined in the dungeon among the rats ;* to be afterwards tortured on the rack at your Majesty's pleasure."

"Not so," resumed her Majesty, "we will ourself see and question this redoubtable Miller of Barnes Common. The rod of my vengeance shall be used with unsparing severity upon these Catholic plotters, but with my Protestant subjects I am determined to be more cautious. This Miller, by report, hath ever been an honest and truthful subject, and I will myself see and examine him. Let him be forthwith brought before us."

No flattery, it has been affirmed, could be too gross for the Maiden Queen. Nay, the sycophants who surrounded her were not afraid at times to affirm, that they dare not

* This horrible hole was a den in the Tower below high water mark, quite dark, and the resort of innumerable rats.

even look upon her when first introduced into her presence, lest their eyesight might be in peril: her face being resplendent as the sun at noon-day.

Strange that one who could so readily look her courtiers through and through on all ordinary and extraordinary occasions, should on this one point be so easily gulled.

But so it was. Cervantes at the same period makes his hero all sense, wisdom, and talent, save on the one point, and there he falls off in a moment.

How the fair and exquisite bevy of ladies who surrounded her, could refrain from bursting into uncontrollable laughter when they saw such cavaliers as Leicester, Hatton, Blount, and Raleigh, standing in apparent admiration of her resplendent face, and shading their eyes with their hands, as they poured forth a whole litany of absurdities about her angelic expression, her Juno like form, her golden locks, &c., &c., is a marvel. For at times, and when she was out of humour with the world and all that was in it,

she would sit and exact this sort of homage by the hour together.

It boded ill for Master Maynard, the Miller of Barnes, who as we have seen had got into terrible trouble in consequence of his humanity and hospitality, that on this occasion the Queen was out of spirits.

In the hope of receiving the reward which had been offered for the re-capture of the fugitive Rookwood, Master Skinflint had secretly informed Leicester of the whole transaction, and implicated his sometime friend in the suspicion of aiding and abetting the escape of Rookwood.

It boded ill, we say, for the burly Miller, that on this morning her Majesty had an accession of ill-humour and irritability. Those who have suffered from that most tiresome, most annoying, and most painful malady can easily understand as much. The sacred radiance of that "sun-like" face it would seem hard to praise on this day, for "where late the diadem stood" the royal head was

swathed up in warm cloths and lace handkerchiefs, and one resplendent cheek was so swollen that it looked like the chanter of a modern bag-pipe.

When therefore Master Maynard was ushered into the presence, he saw before him not the awful beauty which had been represented, (for it so happened that Master Maynard, being always hard at work at his business, had never yet seen the Queen), but a hook-nosed dame, with an awful eye, and all sorts of means and appliances for subduing the grief and torment in her royal jaws.

Resplendent she was certainly ; if being covered with jewels and ornaments of all sorts could make her so, and like those who stood glittering around, she looked quite wonderful to sight. But otherwise she looked like any other mortal under suffering.

“ See how she leans her cheek upon her hand.”

She had better have been in bed ; but no, she battles bravely against this horrible

malady, and yet she is not brave enough to have the offending molar pulled out.

When the round faced, burly, honest old miller was ushered in and brought before her, he stood for some time steadily regarding the "queen like majesty" of her royal visage, ere she condescended to turn her eyes upon him. She was in truth listening to the words of Lord Keeper Bacon, in answer to some question she had just proposed regarding that eternal subject, now always uppermost, namely, marriage; and Bacon to her annoyance was a great advocate for the celibacy of his royal mistress.

"Truly, my lord," she said, after listening for some minutes to his whispered advice, "I must needs confess that you are one of the brightest ornaments of my court; but, alas! your arguments give me some awful twinges, somewhat like this cruel and rebellious tooth, which mars every happiness of my life, and renders me wretched."

"Why don't your Majesty have it out?" said the Miller aloud. "Fore Heaven an' it

be such a traitor to your Royal Highness' peace, have it out, say I."

To say that the whole circle were aghast, were to say but little. The two gentlemen-at-arms who stood halbert in hand on either side the Miller, laid a hand on each shoulder, and shook him as much as to say, "silence in this presence on your life, knave."

The Miller turned his eye on the gentleman at his right. "An' I had you on Barnes Common," he said, "I would make my quarter-staff and your costard well acquainted, spite of that toasting fork you carry. Take your grasp from my arm."

The Queen slowly turned her head from Lord Bacon, and regarded the bluff miller. He by no means shaded his eyes with his hand, but returned her Majesty's gaze unflinchingly.

"You are Master Maynard, Miller on Barnes Common, I presume?" she said.

"Lived there man and boy any time this seventy years and upwards, an' it so please your Majesty," returned Maynard.

"It doth not so well please my Majesty that you should lately have given harbourage to a popish conspirator, one who hath sought my life."

"It would have pleased me and my family just as little had I done so," returned the Miller; "but an' it so please your Majesty I never did that."

"No?"

"No, your Majesty, life is dear to all good English hearts, especially so at such times as we now live in. By the Lord Harry, it would be mortal dangerous to any man to enter my doors who practised against the life of my Sovereign. Gad alive! I'd brain such companion an' he stood upon my very hearthstone."

"You hear this, my Lord Leicester," said the Queen. "Yet this man hath come under your displeasure."

"Only because he hath harboured that popish villain and conspirator, Rookwood," returned Leicester.

"Master Rookwood is no conspirator,"

said the Miller ; “ he who told you so, my lord, lied in his throat.”

“ Silence, knave,” said Leicester, “ you know not what you utter, or before whom you stand.”

“ Ah, but I do though,” said the Miller. “ I stand before the Queen of England. God be thankful therefore ; an’ it had been my luck to be examined before any lesser judge, perchance ere now I had tasted the boots and been stretched upon the wheel. Your lordship had ever been found ready enough to administer both the one and the other to better men than yourself or myself either, for the matter of that.”

“ Go to, knave,” said the Queen, who notwithstanding her affected ire, did indeed rather enjoy the discomfiture of her sometime favourite. “ Go to, you are overbold, and somewhat insolent withal.”

“ I crave pardon if I be so,” said Maynard. “ Nevertheless I will maintain it against anyone, earl, duke, or marquis, that Master Rookwood is an honest, loyal, god-fearing,

albeit an ill-used man. Nay, I hope your Majesty's conscience is quite clear of offence in that quarter."

"How so, Master Maynard?" said the Queen. "Explain yourself and fear not."

"It pleased your Majesty some two years back to pay a visit to this gentleman, this Rookwood. Peradventure, as you expressed yourself pleased with all you saw there, and all that was done whilst you stayed, you may be able to call the visit to mind."

"I do so, and I call also to mind that when I departed thence it was considered a mercy that by the grace of God I had escaped the death which this Rookwood had prepared for me, inasmuch as it is clearly shown that he had invited me to his house for the purpose of more easily disposing of me."

"And that again," said Maynard, "saving your presence, is a confounded lie."

"How," said the Queen, "a lie?"

"It is plain English ; peradventure too plain for such a presence, but it is neither more nor less than a lie. In short, all that your

Majesty hath just now uttered about this man, this Rookwood, are lies."

"How again," reiterated the Queen, "lies, quotha?"

"Yes, lies," said the undaunted Miller, "gross and palpable lies. In the first place, Rookwood never invited your Majesty to visit him at all."

"No; how then?"

"You invited yourself."

"Is this true, my Lord of Leicester?" said the Queen, turning to Leicester, "you had the ordering of this affair."

"Positively I believe—that is to say I think—"

"My lord, my lord," said the Queen, "there hath been some jugglery in this matter, which we will at advantage sift and see into."

"Your Majesty need not go far to do that," said Maynard, "I can explain it all. My Lord of Leicester there had a shrewd slice of Master Rookwood's estate, my Lord Rich had another moiety thereof, my

Lord Burleigh took a very sufficient quantity of the lands, and some other worthy gentlemen got their fairing too. So that amongst them all there was a very pretty pickings. A charge of high treason was then brought against this same Rookwood; he was imprisoned, fined, and stripped of everything. Accusation then followed upon accusation, and nought but death stared him in the face. Under these circumstances, as all was gone but life, and he wished naturally to save that, he escaped from Oxford jail, where he had been lying, and was hunted to my door like a wild beast. I gave him succour and shelter and there's an end of the matter."

The Queen looked hard at the Miller, and the Miller looked hard at the Queen for some minutes.

"I would it were my fault to be followed by a few such honest hearts as this," she said. "Ah, and that reminds me of one whose truth and worth is greater than all here together. Again I say, who hath seen my truant cup-bearer? To lay him by the

heels would perhaps cure this errant propensity in his legs." And then again, as if lost in her own sad thoughts and hopeless love, the Queen laid her cheek upon her hand, and a tear fell from that regal eye.

At length she rose, and once more regarded the Miller. "You may release that worthy man, my lord," she said to Leicester. "Let him return unscathed to his family. I like his bold plain dealing, and at opportunity will pay a visit to his cottage home."

"Heaven bless your Highness," said the Miller, "I am much bounden to you, and I would it were in my power in return to take away even some portion of your Majesty's tooth-ache. An' I might presume to advise, I would fain say—"

"What?"

"That 'twere best to have it out without more ado."

"But that I cannot find heart to do," said the Queen; "I cannot endure the torture."

"Ahem; torture is bad to bear, as many an old host can doubtless affirm," returned

the Miller ; “ nevertheless, although I am myself an old man with not many teeth to spare, an’ your Majesty would like to see that the pain is nothing, I will submit to have a tooth taken out in your royal presence at this moment.”

The Queen laughed. “ By my fay,” she said, “ we have half a mind to put you to the test, Sir Miller.”

“ Nay then, I pray you do not hesitate,” said Maynard. “ There stands your Majesty’s head leech, and here is my tooth. Let him get out his instruments without more ado, and have at it.”

Again her Majesty condescended to smile ; she felt highly amused, and making a signal that she acquiesced, the attendant surgeon advanced, took out his case of instruments, applied the so much dreaded iron fulcrum and claw, gave a wrench, and pulled out one of Master Maynard’s double teeth.*

* This incident is mentioned in Strype’s Life of Aylma, Bishop of London, who was indeed the patient so operated upon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HER MAJESTY was in an awful temper on the day she left the mansion of Sir Francis Walshingham, and betook herself to her royal palace at Richmond, which she did several days earlier than she at first intended.

The indisposition and the disappointment she felt at the absence of the object of her present affection, rendered her at outs with all and everything around; she rated her maidens, and rebuked her attendants at no allowance. Nay, during the tardy and laborious duties of the toilette on that morning, it was affirmed by some of those who were awaiting breakfast in the ante-chamber, that she had actually in her fury at some

peccadillo during the dressing up of one of her wigs, seized and broken Mistress Scudamore's little finger, and cut Lady Lennox over the face with her riding wand.

"The most disinterested of all gifts," she said, as she mounted her palfrey to depart, "are those which sovereigns bestow on undeserving favourites, for they are sure to be repaid with ingratitude. I am well served here by you all," she added, "my soldiers are becoming too arrogant, my parsons too lazy, my physicians too mercenary, and my statesmen and lawyers too powerful."

Her Majesty rode on, taking her way across the Common towards Mortlake, and so on to Richmond. As she approached Master Maynard's cottage, the miller and all his family stood outside the door, and then bowed the knee.

"Heaven save your gracious Majesty," said the Miller, "thou hast restored happiness to this house and all in it, whereas there be more than one there close beside you, who would fain have brought ruin and disgrace

upon me and mine for the sake of the poor inheritance I own."

The Queen drew bridle, and turned to the burly Miller. "By my faith," she said, "I will never, if I know it, believe in aught against my loving subjects more than a parent might believe of her children."

"Heaven save your Highness, again say I," returned the Miller; "we know that here in England right well. As for these frivolous and pretended plots and complots, I would those that plotted and invented them were in my mill dam for half an hour this cold winter's day."

Her Majesty laughed, and Master Maynard, somewhat encouraged by the reception of his last sally, advanced a few paces as if to approach the Queen more nearly; but her Master of the Horse and another noble who rode on either side, pushed their steeds in advance of the royal person, and forced the Miller back with their horses' shoulders.

"Let him approach," said the Queen, "we fear nothing harmful at his hands. Nay,

we would all our subjects were as true and loyal."

The Miller approached close to the Queen, and Leicester drew back. "Your Majesty hath granted a pardon to myself for this matter of Rookwood," he said, "let an old host, and one ever true, ask a further boon?"

"If we can grant it, the boon is yours," said her Majesty.

"It is to grant a pardon to Master Rookwood himself."

"We will take counsel upon that matter," said the Queen; "at least we will consider it well."

"Then is his case hopeless?" said Master Maynard. "Use your own discretion, Madam, and consult not those silken slaves there. The man is true and loyal as myself and these two lads who stand here by my side."

The Queen looked at the Miller's two stalwart sons; she passed over Hodge, but her eye rested upon George. "A good

man's picture" never was passed over by that royal eye.

"Fore me a likely fellow," she said ; "young, strong, and of good proportions. Is that your son?" she inquired of the Miller.

"My youngest son, and it so please ye."

"Wilt take service in my guard, young man?" she said.

"Willingly an' it so please your Majesty," said George, who indeed jumped at the offer.

"Come then, you shall be hostage for this Rookwood," she added ; "we will see to the matter of his pardon, Master Maynard, always remembering that thyself also and all here must be held answerable for his good behaviour."

"My life upon his faith and truth," said the Miller. "Long life to your royal Highness!"

The Queen moved on towards Richmond Palace. Her visit to Sir Francis Walsingham was over ; paid, done with for that

time; and we only wish those who aspire to the pleasure of entertaining the great, could have beheld the discomfort, confusion, fatigue and disorganization herself and her attendants left behind them.

Of comfort during such a visit "let no man speak;" of contentment or satisfaction to the entertainer there was just as little to talk of. If Sir Francis Walshingham could have so ordered it that her Majesty could have given him the honour of her company alone, or with one or two chosen friends, then indeed all had been doubtless well enough. But what with the crowds of courtiers, statesmen, serviteurs, guards, and followers of one sort or other, the whole affair had been not only a mighty failure, but a most absurd piece of distrust, disgust and discomfort, from beginning to end.

'Twas pitiable to behold the state of misery and discontent with which the Lady of the Manor, or Manor House, went about with her maids and men on the day following the one on which her Majesty had left, and

beheld the disorder and destruction of all and sundry.

She could almost have wept to observe the clearing up, cleansing, putting to rights, and "sweetening," as it was the fashion to word it, which the various apartments required. From the buttery hatch to the henwife's cockloft above, all had been wasteful extravagance, ruin, riot, and disorder. Nay, she might have exclaimed with the steward of the Lord Timon,

"So the gods bless me,
When all my offices have been oppressed
With riotous feeders, when our vaults have wept
With drunken spilth of wine ; when every room
Hath blaz'd with lights and brayed with minstrelsy,
I have retired me to a wasteful cockloft,
And set mine eyes at flow."

To a thrifty housewife, and such Lady Walshingham was, these things to see, we say, did marvellously dismay and discomfort.

The cottage home of our worthy old friend, Master Maynard, had also as may be

surmised, been terribly outraged and discomfited. Whilst under the strict surveillance of the officers of justice, the good folks who constituted that worthy family, had been to use a modern term—nowhere. Their way of life had been marred, themselves in a manner dishonoured ; for to lie under the mere suspicion of disloyalty and treason was poison to the blood of old Maynard. Still, the burly old boy had borne all with a brave spirit as we have seen, and had things come to extremity with him, neither rack nor thumb-screw, or even the boots would ever have made him do aught but cry—Long live the Queen. His hatred of oppression made him so far go against his own wishes as to permit of aidance in effecting the escape of Rookwood, who a few days after his arrival at the cottage, had succeeded in getting on board a ship then lying at Gravesend. Such, however, had been the strict surveillance and the malice of those who had molested this unfortunate man, and the greed of those who had portioned, partitioned, and appropriated his property,

that his final escape from the myrmidons who sought his life was by no means an easy matter, and without the aidance and contrivance of the true-hearted and bold spirited Geraldine, would perhaps have failed altogether.

That fair and exquisite creature had from the first taken great interest in the unfortunate fugitive. His gentle manners, his noble bearing under misfortune, his fine person and handsome face, all had served to help to impress him in her favour; though indeed had he been the most ill-favoured mortal in existence, her good feelings would have equally moved her to pity his misfortunes, and to aid him all in her power.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GERALDINE, as we have before seen, was a wilful being, and unless allowed to do things in her own peculiar way, the chances were she would never do them at all. Perhaps the Irish blood in her veins might account for this bold and wilful disposition. At all events, whatever she thought of or suggested, was law to all in the Miller's household, and when she accordingly found that a strict guard was put upon every part of the neighbourhood by the myrmidons of my Lord of Leicester, she determined to circumvent them if in her power to do so, and to go all lengths to carry out the scheme she had devised in order to get Rookwood clear off the premises and up to London.

The meal and flour bag had utterly failed as a safe disguise after Master Skinflint had divulged all to Lord Leicester, and put his hounds fairly upon the scent. She had therefore set her wits to work to find a disguise that would more surely put the officers off the track, till she could get the fugitive fairly out of the neighbourhood.

To this end, she set off on the evening following the one on which he had arrived at the cottage, and betook herself to the Manor House, then crowded, overburthened, and oppressed with the followers of royalty, and royalty itself.

As she was to take part in the performance of the evening, she had access to the property room of the theatre, and selected from thence the appliances and means which she considered most likely to aid her design. Amongst other matters, she selected an old man's head gear, some garments to suit, and some slops or sailor's habiliments. These she bundled up and returned with, so that in a very short time and before the officers came

on that day, the sometime helper or Miller's apprentice was transformed into an "old Adam," with beard and staff, whilst Geraldine herself took a ship boy's semblance.

In this guise, the old man affecting blindness, and his sailor son leading him, they took their way across the Common, passed through the several constables who lurked and watched around, and tramped the main-road towards London.

It was a perilous venture for a maiden in those rude times, and amidst foul roads and winter weather, too, thus to put faith and trust in one who was an entire stranger; and so thought one who looked on admiringly at that noble trusting girl, and thought as much as he did so, and likened her to one of his own creations, even to Rosalind in the forest of Arden.

"But I will suit me all points like a man,
A gallant curtle-ax upon my thigh,
A boar-spear in my hand, (and in my heart
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will,)
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
As many other manish cowards have."

Master Shakspeare, we say, looked on whilst this transaction was taking place, admiringly. Nay, perhaps he also saw in this glorious specimen of female excellence that which might have given him some hints when he drew the characters of Imogene or Viola, for sure no more beautiful, trusting, or devoted girl ever put off her woman's gear against her will, and almost against her cooler judgment, to set forth as guide, protector, and saviour of an innocent and injured man, than did Geraldine, the reputed niece of old Maynard of Barnes Common.

The poet could not altogether approve, but then he could not well offer any remonstrance ; he knew the terrible nature of the punishment awarded to the very suspicion of treason in a catholic. The tortures, miseries, and long imprisonment, only to be escaped by death ; and he knew, also, the perils and dangers which surrounded one so innocent, so unused to the world as this devoted girl ; there seemed, however, nothing else for it. If Master Rookwood did not escape through

the aidance and by the guidance of Geraldine, he would scarcely be able to get away at all. Hodge and George, and every male in that locality, was watched and cared for.

He took the fugitive apart just before they started, and in the fullness of his heart he bespoke him hard.

"You will require no caution, no word from those who value this noble creature to impress upon you that you in turn must take all care of her safety. Dare but to look upon her save as a man might look upon an angel, and I will haunt you through the world. Heaven itself would, I should think, blast you with its lightning if you harm her even in thought.

"Nay, if thou want'st a cord, the smallest thread
That ever spider twisted from her womb,
Will serve to strangle thee ; a rush will be
A beam to hang thee on ; or wouldst thou drown
thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon,
And it shall be as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up."

The fugitive grasped the poet's hand.

"Enough, enough," he said. "I can easily enter into thy feelings, good Master Shakspeare. Be content. To have once beheld that bright excellence is to be for ever her servant, her slave. As far as man can promise, I will care for the maiden. Not in act or in thought could I be guilty of aught to harm so sweet a creature."

"I may trust thee, then," said the poet. "She hath saved my life as she now goes forth with thee alone, unfriended, to aid in preserving yours."

"May hell want pains to torture me, and I be not true to my trust," returned Rookwood.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was thus that Master Rookwood effected his escape from Barnes. As he was a total stranger to that part of the world, and as Geraldine had traversed the road so often before in her several journeys to her relatives in London, she had chosen, as we have seen, in the extremity to which they were driven, to guide him in safety to Southwark.

Master Shakspeare, whose necessities obliged him to be in London, as soon as he was dismissed from attendance, or rather as soon as his management of the theatricals at Walshingham's house was over, had promised to follow Geraldine and her charge.

Meantime he gave them full directions so

that they might rest and refresh themselves, in the first place at his lodging near the theatre, promising to meet them as soon as he could do so without suspicion. Nay, in a few hours he hoped to be upon the road and, peradventure, even to overtake the travellers.

* * *

From Barnes to London in these latter days is but a step. In Elizabeth's day it was quite a journey. In foul weather and in the winter, even a horseman, or such vehicular conveyances as were then in vogue, might stick fast 'twixt town and town, and be delayed whole days and nights; besides which, the roads, bad as they were, were rendered unsafe at all times in consequence of the numerous robbers, caitiffs, and desperadoes of all sorts that infested them. Every glade, or thicket, copse, or dingle might, and did oftentimes, conceal some desperate and ruffianly companion, outlawed by society, and savage as a wild beast. Some fellow or fellows, we say, having the

gallows marked upon their foreheads, and carrying murder in their right hands.

The traffic on this road, small as it then was, was greater than on many others; which arose from the circumstance of the Court being so constantly at Richmond and Sheen, all which had made it of late the favourite resort of the numerous banditti that always haunted the suburbs of London.

What a charm there was in that adventure with such a companion! One that a prince might have felt proud to honour, and yet who thought so little of all she did for all and every one.

The Miller's cottage felt desolate the moment she had left it. She was the angel of the house. None there knew what it was to miss her till she was away—gone—absent.

The old Miller's troubles seemed doubled when he saw that she was away from her usual place.

"Dang it all," he said, scratching his head and standing staring around. "I

be quite at outs without my little lass, my niece. Dang it all, I miss her ringing laugh, I miss all she did all day long; fore me, I miss every thing now. Bless her, she was the light of my eyes. Deuce take this untoward business, say I. Would the poor devil had gone further and had not troubled my household."

George and Hodge too; it is needless to say how they felt her absence, and the old dame her aunt; even the three buxom lasses, Maud, Marion, and Mopsey, who did the daily work of the mill and the cottage, all felt the absence of Geraldine, the pride of Barnes Common, the rustic queen, and beauty of the whole neighbourhood. Nay, the trio, the male portion of the household, the uncle and his sons, would have started off to guard her, but well they knew that they would have been arrested the moment their feet crossed the Common without.

Meantime the travellers passed onward over the Common, and so on through some

thick woodlands, till they reached the banks of the Thames.

To Geraldine every part of the country was well known, as in her rambles with the village maidens in the spring and summer, she had oftentimes traversed the woods and fields for miles and miles. She had, however, on this occasion thought it best to take a circuitous and less frequented route, consequently, what with bye ways and foul ways, and one thing and another, she found herself somewhat bewildered towards mid-day.

Her companion, as they trudged on, had tried as much as in him lay to beguile the time by converse. He had travelled much during his life, and told her many interesting stories of other lands. Amongst other things he had been taken into Syria and Egypt, when quite a child, by the guardian in whose care he had been left, his parents having died when he was quite young; then he had already served in foreign wars, and could tell of accidents by flood and field, whereon it was his hint to speak. All which

so greatly interested his guide, that, somehow, although she had travelled that route several times before, when as before said she had made frequent journeys to London, she found herself at fault amongst the thick woodlands which then grew in the neighbourhood of Fulham.

To add to their difficulties the snow began to fall, and a storm was evidently brewing. They therefore halted in a favourable spot, and whilst Rookwood brushed the snow away from beneath a huge oak, "whose boughs were mossed with age," Geraldine spread out the contents of the wallet he had carried, in order to refresh themselves after their long walk.

The town of Fulham, she knew, could not be very far distant, for often when staying with some relatives there, she had been out maying in this very wood. Rookwood took the cloak from his shoulder, and put it over Geraldine. Then they sat and took their meal whilst the robin hopped about and pecked the crumbs they threw to him. It

was a sweet scene even in that rude weather, and in those picturesque days. They sat and enjoyed their meal in one of the primeval forests of old England, where the wild deer browsed so lonely and secluded, but where now houses stand, and constant traffic fills the streets from sun-rise till night-fall.

Suddenly another actor appeared upon the scene. A tall, ill looking, ruffianly companion stole upon them from out the covert, and approached. His bearing, dress, and appearance at once proclaimed his trade, a gentleman of the shade, one of Diana's foresters; a most awkward customer to fall in with in a lonely spot.

He advanced quietly with a sort of lounging gait, and suddenly stood before the travellers just as they had finished their repast, and were preparing for a fresh start.

Geraldine shrank from his piercing gaze, as she suddenly saw him standing before her. He gave but a passing glance at her appar-

ently old and decrepit companion, then put his fingers to his mouth, gave a low whistle, and another if possible more ill-favoured ruffian advanced from among the trees and joined him.

Rookwood rose, took up the heavy quarter-staff which George had lent him for the journey, and whispered a few words in Geraldine's ear.

"This is awkward," he said, "I like not the look of these fellows; they are evidently outlaws. But have no fear, I will defend you to the last drop in my veins."

The two ruffians whispered to each other. Both bent their eyes upon Geraldine. The first comer approached and laid his hand upon her shoulder. Like his comrade he was half armed, having a buff jerkin, old and ragged, a target at his back, a heavy cut and thrust blade by his side, and a steel helmet on his head.

"You are but lightly clad, boy, for this rough weather," he said, as Geraldine shrank beneath his touch. "Whither bound?"

"For Fulham first," she replied, "then for London."

"And you have lost your track out here, I suppose?"

"We have. I thought I knew the road, but the forest and the snow-storm has bewildered me."

"And yon old man," continued the ruffian, "is he blind, or does he masquerade here like yourself?"

"Like myself?" iterated Geraldine; "I am guiding this person to London," she added, taking Rookwood's hand in her own, and preparing to pass on.

"Stay," said the fellow, stepping before her and stopping the way. "Stand fast, I say. This forest domain here is our kingdom; all who enter it become prize to its subjects. You pass not without tythe or toll."

Geraldine was now sufficiently startled, she hardly knew what to urge.

"We are poor," she said at length; "but if you wish for money, take what you want."

She held out the purse which contained her all as she spoke.

The ruffian put the purse aside, and looked down at her feet, and then took her small hand in his own.

"A tiny foot and a soft hand this," he said laughing a coarse laugh, "to handle the ropes of a carrosel. I have been to sea myself, both east and west, but never yet saw a sailor lad with hands like that. You are a female, and all females are prize to our band."

The blind man had stood beside the tree quite still during this conversation ; his head was bent down, his lids apparently closed, but his ears were open.

As the outlaw finished his cross examination, his companion, at a signal from him, now approached the spot where he stood.

"Hence," he said, "begone whilst you may, ere worse befall you. Your eyesight is not so bad but you'll find your way out of this wood, I dare be sworn. Your companion is our prize."

As the second ruffian spoke, his companion seized Geraldine by the arm, and would have dragged her by main force from the spot, but lo! the blind man recovered his sight in a moment, his eyes flashed fire; he dashed the second outlaw from before him, and rushing upon the fellow who had seized upon Geraldine, heaved up his heavy quarter-staff, and beat out his brains with one blow.

The second robber now drew his blade, and in turn assailed Rookwood.

But he might as well have opposed a tiger in such a cause. The blade was struck from his grasp in an instant, and he would have turned and fled, had not Rookwood sprung upon and seized him in his powerful grasp.

"Harkee, villain," he said, "I will brain you as I have served your companion there, unless you guide us incontinently from this labyrinth, and put us on the main track to Fulham."

The ruffian eyed him askance as he

cowered under his eye. He gave a shuddering look aside at his brained and bleeding comrade, and then without more circumstance pointed with his finger the direction they were to traverse, and still grasped by the collar, the trio hastily put on.

* * * *

There was a ford which crossed over to the little town of Fulham at this period, and for that the travellers now made. The outlaw, still firmly grasped by the stout-hearted Rookwood, guided them out of the tangled maze of the wood in which they had involved themselves, and then the river's bank lay before them. Crossing over, they were soon safely housed in the house of Master Maynard's sister; and next morning at dawn they again set forth and proceeded on their journey towards London.

Towards London, we say, for again one must remind our readers that in Elizabeth's day, and even a century later, a few miles of travel through the foul roads and tangled

byeways were not achieved without toil and difficulty, danger and adventure.

From Fulham to Chelsea was quite a difficulty, thence to the main road quite a toil.* And then after considerable labour our travellers plodded on till they reached old London.

* It was then called as now, the King's Road, and had been used by Royalty for some centuries before.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AMONGST the innumerable byeways in London, which are even yet familiar to the hurried pedestrian, there is a well known line of streets and lanes which lead from old St. Paul's to the great thoroughfare of Blackfriars Bridge.

Near this spot, centuries ago, stood the great religious house of the Dominicans, or Black Friars. Here in the hallowed precincts of a still more ancient church, where the royal and the noble lay entombed, but where we may look in vain for their relics ; here, where the parliaments of the old kings of olden times sat, and where the Normans extorted gold from their complaining citizens ; here where in later times Wolsey pronounced the sentence of divorce against Queen

Katherine. Here, we say, in these precincts close by the old church of the suppressed Monastery, surrounded too by houses tenanted by nobles and courtiers—in this very spot—still known as Play House Yard; here was subsequently in Elizabeth's day reared the Theatre of the Blackfriars, and here lounging, and uttering their witticisms, the choice and master-spirits of Shakspeare's day were to be found amidst the throng. What a scene it must have been; jugglers, pedlars, and petty chapmen—vagabonds all—and amongst whom even that wondrous mortal with his mighty heart and mighty mind haunted and fretted his hour; and amongst which he, even he, came under the designation of a vagabond too.*

Our readers of the present day—spectators of the gorgeous scenery and the magnificence with which the great poet's dramas are now

* The history of the early stage exhibits a succession of conflicts between the players and the Puritans. See also the 14th Act of Elizabeth for punishment of rogues and vagabonds.

enacted, would stare and smile contemptuously, we opine, if they could look back upon the theatre of the Blackfriars, and which good Master Burbage had adapted for the purpose of a common playhouse. Nay, perhaps the appointments of the very barn of a strolling company, hastily adapted by the aid of a few boards and some drapery with pendant hoops, and a row of dips for foot-lights, would not perhaps be much under the mark.

* * * *

On the day on which our travellers were making their way into the suburbs, they could hardly have failed to observe upon post and rail as they neared the city, little bills here and there affixed; and which bills announced that a new history was to be performed at the Theatre of the Blackfriars; nay, as the evening wears on, there are watermen landing passengers at the stairs, and hasty steps pacing the narrow and tortuous streets south of Ludgate.

Meantime the pit of the said theatre is

filling fast, the good folks are tolerably quiet as they enter. The city madam and her well to do husband, the buxom daughter, so trim and neat, and the stalwart swash-buckler pushes on amongst the crowd ; see how the latter eyes the buxom dame with the trim ancle and the looped up farthingale, there is language in her laughing eye, in her very gait. Then comes Tarleton, the famous Tarleton, dressed for his part, and full of his ropery too. He loves a joke as he passes onwards ; hark, how they laugh at his sallies, for he knows many there who have come to see him disport himself on the boards.

The Blackfriars is a winter theatre, and the snow is falling in light flakes, as a horseman pulls up his steed, dismounts, hands it to a red-nosed tatterdemallion, one of the hangers-on of the doorway—and after a glance at the crowd, and a familiar nod to Tarleton, walks apart and seems to be looking for some new comers, who have perhaps appointed a meeting in that very locality. 'Tis indeed no less a man than Master William Shakspeare, who

has but now arrived post haste from Barnes.

Somewhere about this time, he had computed and anticipated the arrival of the fugitives he had seen start the day before, and his anxiety for their safe arrival was great. His lodging is near the river, and he waits to guide them to it, as he has found on calling there that they have not arrived, and may possibly have gone onwards.

Yes, 'tis Shakspeare's self ; he stands in old London, near to the theatre, and one of his own plays is about to be performed.

Old London is dangerous at this hour, its narrow streets in this neighbourhood especially so, and Shakspeare knows as much. A passenger may be stopped and openly assailed by some cut-purse rascal, or he may be seized, forced into some den, stabbed, thrust down a trap, and never again seen or heard of. Again, some lurker behind a buttress or corner may smite him at advantage, brain him, or cut him across the legs,*

* Such doings were of frequent occurrence in Elizabeth's reign.

and bring him down as Roderigo served Cassio.

“Oh, villain, what murder men i’ the dark.”

Well the poet knew all this, and as the shadows deepened he became more and more anxious, and then he walked onwards, hoping still to meet Rookwood and Geraldine.

Yes, Shakspeare walked onwards, his mind was absent from the scene around, interesting as it was. He observed not the crowd who thronged to the theatre on occasion of his new play, to witness indeed the heroic deeds of their forefathers.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON this same evening, albeit the day had been tolerably fine, the sky was overcast, a snow-storm was coming on. The dark waters of the Thames only partially frozen, surged about and tossed the masses of ice to and fro as Shakspeare neared the old bridge. Suddenly the sound of strife was heard in the narrow street the poet was now traversing; blows given and taken—"hard crab tree and old iron rang." A woman's shriek was heard. Shakspeare turned at the sound. Marlow the poet and dramatist at this moment came past.

"Ah, what, Will Shakspeare, why what makes you here when your new play is being acted?"

"Hist, what sounds are those?" said Shakspeare.

"Some drunken rufflers are out to-night," said Marlow; "Alsations no doubt; dangerous customers, Will, best draw off."

"I expect friends here by appointment. Heaven send they be not mixed up with yonder brawl, for they are unused to the ways of this town."

"Prithee, have a care, Will," returned Marlow, taking his friend by the arm "to be mixed up in such affairs at this hour is death."

Shakspere shook himself free, and hastened to the scene of action, as another shriek reached their ears; whilst Marlow who feared his brother poet might get into trouble, as hastily followed.

The poet was not a bit too soon if he meant to save his friends from harm, perhaps death. In an instant, as he neared the scene of action he saw as much. He recognised at a glance the gentle Geraldine and her stout-hearted protector in the midst of a rout of drunken revellers, the Mohawks of that day, men who when excited by inordinate cups

were rendered reckless of everything in heaven above or on the earth beneath.

The wretches, six in number, had overtaken Rookwood and his guide just as they had crossed the bridge of the Blackfriars, and were traversing a narrow street in its vicinity. They had stopped, overhauled, and were proceeding to ill-treat them, as the poet and his friend hurried up to the scene of action.

Rookwood, again "good at need," had thrown himself before Geraldine, and with his stout staff opposed their opposing rapiers; for the drunken villains had barely called upon the two passengers to defend themselves, ere they threw themselves upon them.

Rookwood's quarter-staff was again all potent. It rang the changes upon old iron to some purpose, and even Geraldine with the small ship's cutlass she carried, managed to put aside more than one deadly home thrust made at her.

A piercing shriek, however, showed that

she had felt the sharp pang of cold steel as Shakspeare took part in the strife.

Six to two, nay almost six to one, we may say, had been rather long odds.

The Alsatians were desperate dogs, they stood to no repairs, and Rookwood's cudgel had already taught two of them a shrewd lesson, when Shakspeare and his friend sprang to the rescue. The poet was no youngster to deal with. He had been inured to all the sports of his native county, and was a good swordsman too. He drew his blade and thrust manfully into the fray, ran one tall cavalier through the body, and taking Geraldine's fainting form in his left arm, turned like a lion upon the next ruffian. Marlow was not behindhand, he had also assailed one of the ruffians, but received a thrust which prostrated him in the instant, and he fell bathed in blood beneath a small gateway, near which the fray was taking place. In short, in a few minutes those Alsatians who were not on their mother earth now turned and fled.

Luckily the lodgings of the poet were not far distant, and sheathing his blade, still bearing the insensible form of Geraldine in his arms, bidding Rookwood follow, he hastily sought them, and placed Geraldine upon a bed in his own room.

* * * *

At first when Shakspeare laid his fair burthen down he thought she had only fainted, but in a moment as he observed that blood was trickling from one of her arms he found that a rapier thrust had pierced quite through her right arm just above the elbow, and she had fainted from the pain and subsequent loss of blood. The poet was deeply grieved, and somewhat alarmed, for an artery had been pierced, and the flow of blood was great.

He knelt down beside her, and as much as in him lay endeavoured to stop the blood and dress the wound, but with all his efforts he found it impossible to do so. Nay, so pale, so dead in look did Geraldine seem, and so deep was the swoon she was in, that both

himself and the fugitive Rookwood feared she was already past hope.

Consigning her to the care of the old woman who generally attended him, and to the superintendence of Rookwood, he hastened out in quest of a surgeon.

There was an old hostel or tavern close at hand, at which it was the custom of the Leech of the neighbourhood to spend his evenings among a goodly company of the neighbouring citizens ;—a sort of club of good fellows of that day, and with whom many of the actors of the Blackfriars and Globe Theatres were wont to crush a cup after the performance was over.

Mine hostess of this tavern was a most excellent specimen of her class, buxom, jovial, and good tempered with all and sundry her various guests ; “ a most sweet wench,” as Falstaff words it. She knew well, too, how to dress a broken costard, and to tend a green wound, for plenty of such did her vocation, and the choice spirits who frequented her tavern bring her acquainted with.

To her Shakspeare first made known his trouble, and despatched her to his lodging, after which, finding his friend the Leech was not present, he set off in quest of another and a lesser practioner, whose shop he had oftentimes remarked.

"I do remember an apothecary, and hereabouts he dwells.
As I remember, this should be the house. What,
ho ! Apothecary."

The wonderful description of an apothecary's shop at this period ; the "alligator stuffed, and other skins of ill shaped fishes. Its green earthern pots, bladders, and musty seeds," were doubtless duly regarded by the poet as he entered the shop, and hastily summoned the poor practioner, and then carried him off to the aid of Geraldine Maynard.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHEN Shakspeare turned back to his lodgings, almost dragging the apothecary with him; for the man was a mere anatomy, so wan, and thin, and starved, that he appeared scarcely able to totter along, he found Geraldine still in the same state, or if possible even worse than when he had left her. Nay, as he gazed upon her pallid features, he began to doubt whether she was not really a corpse.

However, "death, that had suck'd the honey of her breath, had had no power yet upon her beauty."

The poet, who in his great anxiety had almost carried the Leech up-stairs and into the room, stood in speechless anxiety whilst the

old man bent over the prostrate form of the girl, and then turned and walking up to the table, took a phial from his breast, and poured some of its contents into a chalice.

"'Tis not the elixir vitæ," he said, in answer to Shakspeare's look. "No, let others gull themselves with that chimera. It is not the elixir vitæ, I say again, but it will be the saviour of life here I hope. We can but try it, at any rate," he muttered, as he again approached the bed, and poured the contents of the cup down Geraldine's throat.

"She's not dead, I trust?" inquired Shakspeare.

"No, not dead; that is, not quite dead; the citadel still holds out. But—" and then the Leech turned to the patient, took her arm, which was still supported by the patient Rookwood, who also stood like a statue on the other side the bed and watched her, and after carefully examining it, proceeded to do his best to repair the mischief. He then put his finger on his lip, drew a chair near to the

bed, and by signs made the poet and his friend understand that he wished them to withdraw, and leave the patient with himself and mine hostess of the tavern.

"She breathes freely now," he said, "and the heart pulsates; nothing more is to be done at present. Quiet and rest is now our only chance."

"Is he worthy of trust, think ye, or shall I seek more help?" inquired Shakspeare of the hostess, as he prepared to leave the room with Rookwood.

"What, old Basset worthy of trust, quotha? eh, is he, simply the cleverest Leech that ever mixed a philtre, or breathed a vein," said mine hostess. "Too much learning hath he, poor soul, and too little money, that's all. You may safely leave the patient in his charge, and I will sit and watch till morning."

The poet felt reassured, he took out his purse, and put several pieces of gold into the unconscious hand of the apothecary.

The poor devil started at the touch of the

coin, looked at them with something like astonishment, then at the poet, then half rose, then sat down again, and at length thrust them into the pocket of his trunks.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN the principal parlour of the very hostel to which Shakspeare had hastened in search of assistance for Geraldine Maynard, some few hours afterwards were assembled several of the remarkable actors and dramatic writers of that remarkable decade. Amongst others, the wounded Marlow, Lodge, Greene, Kyd, and Nash, were present. It was a long room, low in ceiling, and with its one large window at the further extremity, which window beetled like the stern of a huge ship or carossel, over the waters of the Thames; nay, it seemed when viewed from without as if propped up by the huge piles or beams, which held its tottering extremities over the stream.

Besides the authors we have mentioned,

several actors who had borne a part in the new play were assembled on this night. .

They sat at a long cumbrous table for the most part, although two or three were cozily crouched beneath the ample chimney ; on the stonework of which chimney was carved the quarterings of the Warwick family.

It would be a curious sight now, and an interesting scene to picture these men and this room at such an hour ; and whilst they waited impatiently the coming of him, who despite the angry feelings and the sharp envy of many there, they could hardly choose but hold in the highest respect, and even look upon as a living breathing wonder. For unappreciated as he might possibly be, and doubtless was by the multitude ; yet amongst those who were men of genius, authors, dramatists and poets—men who knew what it was to write, to imagine, to compose : such men, we say, could scarcely fail to admire and estimate one whose slightest touch came like refined gold upon the mere dross which the fairest writer there produced in comparison to his own lines.

On this night one of Shakspeare's dramas had been performed ; high and low had been to see it, and all had been impressed and delighted. But strange to say, the author himself—he who had heretofore been used to stand amidst those court nobles and gallants, whose privilege it was to flutter upon the stage ; he who used to receive the praise of Royalty in the theatre, had not been present on this night of nights. In his absence, therefore, as is generally the case, sharp and bitter envy had been at work, the play was well and thoroughly discussed, its wondrous beauties 'tis true were commented upon by his friends, and its faults, (if it really had any) were "set in a note book, learned and conned by rote," to throw into his teeth when he appeared. Nay, there were some there who gnashing the teeth of disappointment and jealousy, scrupled not as they sat over their cups to liken him to the crow in the fable, who had beautified himself with the feathers of other birds.

"Yes, by my faith, 'an upstart crow,'" whispered Greene to his next neighbour ;

“one who knows forsooth, how to bombast out a blank verse in these ‘drum and trumpet dramas,’ but a fustian knave at the very best. Pah, pass the bowl. Pshaw, Shakspeare, eh ! the only shake-scene in the county, I suppose.”

* * * *

“O that man should put an enemy into his mouth
To steal away his brains.”

Greene, and Marlow, and several others, we greatly fear, were very drunk ; fit to quarrel with their own shadows upon any theme ; others again more quietly sipped their sack and canary, and puffed out volumes of the weed from small-bowled pipes, for tobacco was only just then come into fashion. Presently some men of high rank, would-be wits too, —who rather affected the company of men of letters, yet could not pen a stanza themselves, as the night wore on entered the room. They were not intruders exactly, yet their company was not wished for there. Such fellows generally get quarrelsome and troublesome in their cups. They laugh out

of place, applaud where they should censure, and address themselves to the drawers rather too frequently. By and by others arrive, and venture to look in as the dawn is almost breaking. There are many who, on this night wherein a new play is produced, wish to see and hear the author. Some cankers of the war are also present, fellows whose hats are cocked, and whose blades are a foot longer than the Queen's regulation. Fellows from the Low Countries, fellows from the Irish wars, who call their generals by familiar names, such as, "Essex said thus to me on such a day, and Leicester spoke thus to me at another time."

Almost all men were at this period excited to a pitch of fury, too, by polemical disputes. It was not so much the quarrel between Protestant and Romanist, as between the National Church and Puritanism. The theatres, too, those powerful teachers, lent themselves to the controversy. Altogether, what with one thing or other, the large tavern room on this night became quite a

scene of confusion worse confounded. Swords were drawn ; Master Richard Burbage pitted himself against Master Baptiste Goodall, both actors of the Blackfriars, and under ordinary circumstances sworn friends. Then there was Howard too, the author of several quaintly named pamphlets, a scoffer and a satirical dog ; him did Harvey, the intimate friend of Spencer, assail most furiously, on account of a pamphlet called " Pap cut with a Hatchet."

" Pap with a hatchet, eh ? thou thin faced gull ?" said Harvey, turning and assailing Howard, by throwing a whole bottle of sack in his face. " There's pap for thy hatchet face—"

Then in turn, Greene, who was ever a fiery disputatious companion, not finding his old aversion, Will Shakspeare, present, fell foul of Marlow, and twitted him in harsh language with having stolen more than half his " Tamburlaine from an older work ; denied that he had any hand at all in his play of Faustus, and ended by designating the Jew of Malta a

mass of fustian rubbish." Then he threw himself into attitude, and in mock heroic style began reciting some of Marlow's lines.

" 'Casaine and Theremidorus to arms,
Rouse cavalieros from the clouds,
And with the cannon break the frame of heaven.'

"There, my masters all, what think ye of that?"

In short, such a tavern brawl ensued as had not been seen even in that brawling age and locality for some time.

There was one Parolles, too, a sort of led captain, a boasting bullying fellow, all scarves and big looks, and bannerets; he forsooth was thrown by Ben Jonson through the casement into the stream below, and all but drowned. More than one unfledged poet, who carried a sonnet in his glove,* was thrust into the street with a broken costard. Several essenced fops, too, with love lock and

* A custom amongst the tavern haunting namby-pamby poets of that period.

beard most artistically dyed, were utterly demolished by some of the roaring blades of Chepe ; so that dawn broke ere the riot and confusion had ended.

END OF VOL. I.

